

Carnuntum

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Guido Von List

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Translation by AI *

There are arguments for and against the validity of AI translation. Some people only want to read translations by bilingual humans. However the rarity of these bilingual translators puts a massive bottleneck on the transfer of information and culture between the two largest European language groups, English and German. So, come the revolution, yes, all of the old works in German will be translated by a vast and powerful collegium of highly paid professional bilingual speakers, but until then we will have to make do with the clunkier but functional AI translation. Making do with this translation will in effect open up hundreds if not thousands of works in heretofore unread German books to the English speaking world. For those who like the "human touch", and that is the superior method by far, please do read only the first chapter of the deluge of German/English works coming out and pick and choose those works which are worthy of "real" translation and translate them! Keep in mind the AI translation may be superior in several respects: less bias, larger vocabulary, and will improve with time, whereas the career prospects of bilingual book translators seems to be stuck in permanent reverse.

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A Timeless Tale

In which we are introduced to the principal players in the eternal war between empire and folk, represented here by the Romans and the Germans where they collided at the edge of the Roman empire, Carnuntum, the capitol of Pannonia in beautiful Austria, on the banks of the Danube.

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Reviews

Praise for the "Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk: Esoteric and Exoteric"

- "Excellent book on Wotan and Aryan beliefs, pre-Christian Germanic customs, religion and much more."

- "This book is very informative and detailed for those who are of German descent and want to reconnect with your roots and the Gods of your kind."

Praise for the "The Secret of the Runes"

- "After carefully explaining each rune he goes into a linguistic explanation of roots of Germanic words and word meanings. Some of this then applies to the runes as hieroglyphs. Throughout all he weaves Aryan thought and religion."

- "In short, it seeks to mesh all that he considered to be good of Germany into a singular text, a weltanschauung."

Praise for the "The Invincible"

- "Incredible piece of literature to honour my ancestors and all they worked so hard for...if you love your folk please invest in this author."

Future Projects & Notes

- The German Mythological Landscape is the next translation project for 2023. This large 2 volume work is essentially a collection of the most promising pre-Christian religious sites in Großdeutschland. At the minimum, it could serve as a definitive travel itinerary for anyone wanting to see and consecrate Asatru historical sites of Europe.

- The Wikipedia lists "Jung Diethers Heimkehr" as a novel published by List, but it is not. It is a short story only in the Alraunen-Mären - this is confirmed not just by my research, but in a German doctoral thesis on List as well.

- Stephen Flowers has been a controversial translator of List; I ran several pages of the original List through the AI translator which absolutely agrees with the Flowers translation, so feel free to read the Flowers translations with confidence until such time as someone does a full side by side comparison.

- The "Ostdeutsche Rundschau" was an Austrian newspaper from about 1890-1904 that was a major early publisher for List. This newspaper has been digitized on the Austrian state library website, and Flowers' "Secret of the Runes" bibliography lists several early List articles that would be very interesting and easy to translate as side projects.

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Dedication

To Thorshof,
Words are Wind, Deeds are Iron

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the good folk of the Asatru Folk Assembly for taking our Gods out of the pages of books and into the reality of our daily lives. We believe in ourselves and in the Aesir. Today a thousand hearts beat as one in our church; tomorrow may it be millions.

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Chapter 11

Milites Mithrae

Again the noble world of Carnuntum crowded into the Hibernum Castrum. The atrium, as well as the colonnades, were filled with lively moving groups and an inextricable swirling of sounds buzzed and hummed above. The high council was not yet united, so the brightest stars of the society gathered their planets around them, and these again their moons; for the sun, before whose rays all the little lights dimmed, the emperor, had not yet appeared.

Equitius, the legate, was also among them. Many a "salve" from distinguished lips had greeted him confidentially, and here and there he had to linger for longer discourse.

Then he saw the two inseparable friends Licinius and Petronius, as they walked along in eager conversation under the rows of columns. He had not spoken to them since their last encounter in the same place, so he approached them with a friendly greeting.

Today, the aedile no longer needed to remind Equitius that he remembered his rank; habit and a powerfully awakened sense of self had already done their duty. But even the aedile no longer approached him with the patronizing kindness of those days; he was shrewd enough to treat the favorite of Caesar as an equal colleague, even though the latter was still inferior to him in rank, for he was clearly aware that the lucky upstart would soon be above him.

It was different with Petronius; the latter faced a superior who had gone from being a centurion, skipping the tribune rank with all its gradations, to becoming a legate. This hurt the old favorite of three Caesars. But Equitius was too noble not to honor this unspoken feeling of the old centurion, and therefore met him with open cordiality, by which he soon completely won the heart of the veteran. Soon Petronius forgot to see in Equitius an example of Fortuna's capricious favor, and became the most enthusiastic admirer of his advantages and merits.

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But when the legate promised both of them to celebrate his new dignity at such a symposium in the circle of worthy fellow students and asked them to be his guests, the worthy veteran was close to find him worthy of apotheosis and to add him to the number of his favorite gods.

Licinius, too, was anxious to help his friend Petronius fill the gap of difference in rank between him and his new friend; therefore he said to the legate: "My dear Equitius! Do you still remember the Milites Mithrae? You met us at a good hour, for we wanted to visit you at your home. You are astonished, Legate, that I call the Centurion Petronius your friend? He is, and deserves to be, for he was so to you when you were Centurion; he is the Prefect of the Milites Mithrae, in him you see our Pontifex maximus, he approved your admission into our brotherhood!"

Licinius had hit it just right; Petronius was now overjoyed, and a grateful look met the Aedile as if to say, "You are a good fellow after all, now I forgive you all your logic including the fallacy of the elephant!" But he did not say this, of course, although the Aedile's mischievous smile betrayed that he understood the look. Now Petronius felt superior to the legate again, and with the most courteous courtesy and collegial nature, assumed the mien of benevolence, overjoyed to assert his dignity and importance even to a legate.

To Licinius, this was the most delicious eye candy.

"By the sword of Mithras, which is never missing!" began Petronius in a mildly reproving tone to Licinius: "If you were not one of the highest sacred, you would have to severely atone for this violation of our high secret! Have you not considered that our revered friend, the legate, despite all his merits, is for the time being still a profane, an uninitiated? But because he has so masterfully withstood our trials thus far, you are forgiven this grave debt!"

Licinius assumed a contrite countenance, but hardly sought to conceal the smile that played about the corners of his mouth, and in return had to accept a look of reproach from the prefect of the Milites. Turning to Equitius, the latter added with imperturbable Dignity:

"So you have learned it prematurely, and now know it, why I am your friend! Strike! the favorite of a Caesar must not be ashamed to call that of three Caesars his friend!"

Equitius heartily struck the offered right hand and assured the worthy that he felt gratified by such friendship. He told him much more of the pleasant things in earnest, to which he again received a dignified, well-meaning answer from Petronius, and so, to the great amusement of the aedile, the conversation between the two continued for some time.

When it seemed to Licinius enough, he interrupted this conversation by saying to Equitius:

"Listen then, excellent friend! Today at the midnight hour you shall behold the high light and receive the consecration, if duties against Caesar do not prevent you from doing so; for the supreme law is that one consecrated to

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Mithras must fulfill his soldierly duty! Art thou ready?"

Equitius agreed, and the aedile then gave him further instructions on how to prepare himself worthily for the sacred act. Petronius also did not spare his teachings and deeply regretted that it was not granted to him to assist Equitius in his preparations, since he himself had to gather for the high service of the invincible Mithras, who was waiting for him today.

Now Licinius took the legate confidentially under his arm and thought to ask him about Erchantaug; but then one of the imperial lictors came to call Equitius into the throne room.

Short, therefore, was the parting.

"Two hours before midnight in your legate's armor, yet unmounted and alone, five hundred paces outside the outer porta principalis dextra! Vale!" Licinius still whispered this to him. Inimitable dignity, however, transfigured the face of the favorite of three deified emperors. He wanted to start a speech, but Licinius pulled him away, and so he had to take the well-chosen words with him unspoken. The two friends went to prepare themselves for tonight's sacred act.

The most suitable place for this was then, and often still is, an inn; for it is not by chance that the ancients invented a venerable proverb and truth, which reads: "In vino veritas".

In Edone's triclinium, the two brothers in Mithras soon lay comfortably anchored on the soft cushion of the dining bed in front of polished goblets, presumably stretched out for persistent mental work. Both were silent, thinking and shaping the speeches they were going to give, and at the same time constantly moistening the seed of their thoughts with the fruit of the Asti vine, so that it would grow and flourish.

But the fact that a legate was paying homage to him today, in view of the Caesar's court, disturbed the brave Petronius in his musings and gave them a different turn. If the Mithras grotto were poorly attended! The thought frightened him. What a bad impression on the legate! Patroclus, the crier, was immediately sent to all the Mithras brothers with the urgent admonition not to stay away from the grotto today as they usually did. Petronius was reassured when his favorite slave had departed. With a dignified draught he emptied the cup, then turned to his confederate Licinius and began to tell in great circumlocution what trials he intended to impose on the legate, what special extensions of the ritual he had planned, and what else he had found expedient to order.

But Licinius had had enough of all this; he cut off his friend's speech with the words, "My worthy prefect, pontifex maximus et caetera! All this rests so securely in your unsurpassable direction that I wish to be surprised by the sight of it! The foretaste of early revelation would too much dampen the mighty impression of solemnity; and that would be a pity!"

The dignified man did not know whether such words should be praise or

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scorn, and thoughtfully sought the solution of this question in his cup. Licinius, however, took advantage of the desired pause by calling aloud the name of the singer Dorias. So quickly was she on the spot that it could easily be guessed that she had been listening to the call at the door. With a confidentially mischievous "Salve, my high patron!" she hopped towards Licinius, smilingly adjusted his rosary, which had gotten into disorder, and took liberties that clearly showed that the strict Aedile must have been carousing here many times since the day of the imperial entry.

Petronius shook his head in annoyance at what he had to watch; words of disapproval forced themselves upon his lips. But since a vague feeling told him that Licinius would not lend a willing ear to his reproaches, he only grumbled into the cup:

"By Mithras, proud of victory! The service of the noble Mithras is desperate enough! Idle flirtation instead of serious collection of the mind! - Hm! - Horrible!" -

He cast a wistful glance at the unworthy, sadly emptied the cup and filled it again to empty it even more sadly.

Deep melancholy seized him, as he thought about how earnestness and zeal among the Milites Mithrae were dwindling more and more, how old tests and conditions had to be eased continuously, in order to still preserve the service of the noble sun god! And only these Christians were to blame for it! After all, lately everyone strove to take the baptism, and even the unconfirmed legend went that Caesar himself The old man trusted his cup with an unfeeling word of scorn and grimly clenched his fist around it! How different then, since he himself had been a neophyte and the high secrets had not yet sunk into a game. When he saw the "light" - it was on the feast of the birth of the rock, on the same day on which the Christians - whom Mithras may crush - celebrated the feast of the birth in the stable, he had been allowed to starve for fifty days, once a day he was allowed to enjoy only bread and water, for twenty days he had to sleep in the open, bedded in snow, and for two days he had to let himself be whipped to the blood, only then he was given the first degree of the "Raven"! Three years he remained there, then he came into the second degree of the "Secret", and so it went on under terrible trials until he became one of the "Milites" in the third degree. Then, after long pauses and ever more severe tests, followed the degrees of the "Lions", the "Persians", the "Sun Runners," and finally - already graying - he received the degree of the "Fathers". And now, what lukewarmness! Where were the times when the Soldier-Caesars like Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and many another sought consecration themselves! The high mystery was outdated and faded, the cult of Mithras rested only on a single pillar, the ritual, and even this was already rotten and began to totter. Horrible

In the meantime, the Aedile's mind was not particularly troubled by such concerns.

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He reveled in the caresses of the girl, who had already completely dominated the omnipotent one and had accustomed him to obeying her commands without fail. Dorias knew that she should not tighten the bonds with which she tied him, but she also knew that she would lose her dominion over him as soon as she complied with his wishes. Without acting brittle, this Roman Phryne had known how not to grant Licinius everything and thus keep him in perpetual tense hope.

Like his brother in Mithras from Baccho's gifts, he lay intoxicated by the lure of Venus. His glowing eyes were fixed on the lovely singer, who rested casually in his lap and, wrapping her arms around his neck, dallied with the roses of his wreath.

As if playing with the wreath, she drew his head down to her full bosom and whispered in his ear:

"Wilt thou, my only beloved, fasten Doria's happiness forever? Do you want me to be all yours? One word from you, and this tavern is mine and I am no longer a slave whose love disgraces you! Dorias has only one life, one happiness, one soul, one everything, one God, and that one thing is you!"

Sobbing passionately and smiling again with tears, she pressed the bewildered man to her heaving bosom, kissing the words of reply from his mouth, until, seized by wild passion, he sprang up and made an oath to destroy Edone and Parus, in order to be able to give the tavern and freedom to his beloved.

Glowing kisses were his reward; but then she whispered again in his ear: "Leave your game now, my hot lover! Soon I will love thee as Venus loves Adonis; never, however, shall the embrace of a despised slave profane my supreme God!" And again she burst into tears. "Make haste, my only one!" she cried, sobbing. "My longing for Thee is more agonizing than thirst in Aethiopia's desert; if haste Thou not, it is my death!"

Licinius was beside himself, he wanted to answer with caresses, but Dorias repulsed him, wailing and shedding tears. He repeated his oaths and affirmed that he wanted to think about what crime he could accuse Parus and Edone of, such a beginning required time....

But then Dorias sprang up with a shrill cry as if in madness, tore her robe, and rushed out of the triclinium shouting, "He loves me not!"

Licinius caught up with the fugitive in the semi-darkness of the tablinium, where he snatched a drawn knife from the frenzied woman, which she threatened to thrust into her exposed bosom. - That such a beginning was only comedy did not even remotely occur to the otherwise so clever Aedile.

Only with difficulty did he manage to gradually calm the raving woman.

In a corner at the altar of the Lares they stood together in whispering conversation for a long time.

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Night had fallen.

Equitius stood at the Limes, five hundred paces from the Porta principalis dextra. The darkness of a moonless night enveloped him.

That solemn mood had crept into his soul, which every noble mind experiences when it thinks it is approaching a deity. He had still made too superficial glances into the shallow world to recognize the falsification in the calculating messages of the Aedile, which he took for solid gold. He thought to stand before an important turning point in his life, hoped by his admission into that circle of the devotees to come so much closer to the gods, and did not suspect that he was about to join a body which consisted only of deceivers and cheats, and whose purpose and meaning had long ago fallen like ripe fruit from the trunk.

Like a soldier taking his first watch, Equitius stood on the point designated to him, and his gaze was lost in the tangle of shadows of the night.

In front of him rose the rocky peak called "the stone," and from its crest loomed the shy round tower of Erchantaug, in which Aistmuth consecrated himself to Wuotan. To the left, however, above the foaming Danubius, the many-pointed rock profile of the Maidenberg rose, which in the days of primeval times formed a whole with the stone before the onrushing waters separated the two forever.

Each of the two rock colossi held in its inner crevice something significant for the legate, the one over there the mermaid, this one over here Mithras.

At this moment, both rocky mountains aroused a powerful excitement in the mind of the legate, but this was soon disturbed. To the left of the Limes, the bushes began to rustle, as if something hostile were approaching by stealth. Equitius finally spotted a black masked man with a demanding face, who seemed to be approaching him.

He could not interpret his intentions, but decided to brave every danger manfully and did not let the figure out of his sight.

"Already the ravens await thee!" cried the lost man, when he had come close to the legate.

Equitius did not understand him, so he said: "As long as I carry shield and sword, I never fear the cawing of the ravens; only to the dead they are terrible!"

"Soon you shall be a dead man," replied the man, and he disappeared into the darkness of the night.

No sooner was the black man gone than another terrifying figure approached. This one was wrapped in white linen. Its gait was stiff and forced, because the hooded figure wanted to make people believe that it was floating, as is believed of ghosts. The haunting was ill-timed. Equitius barely managed to suppress an uneasy feeling, for he had expected trials of a different kind. Then the spectre croaked, as if it were a bad comedian: "The dead call the

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dead; prepare to die!"

"The soldier always is, but he greets death even according to soldierly custom, mark you!" Unwillingly Equitius shouted these words, rattling his weapons as the ungainly specter limped away.

Only with difficulty did he calm his mind. The burgeoning displeasure that they wanted to frighten him with child's play and play an unworthy game with him had dampened the high enthusiasm in his soul. He paced up and down the Limes with displeasure; he needed to collect himself. From this, however, unpleasant noise of weapons tore him and the call: "There he stands, up, send him to Tartarus!"

These words had been shouted by an armed man with a cloaked face, who immediately leapt aside while six heavily armored gladiators, swords drawn, advanced on Equitius.

It was not a mock fight, as initially the legate suspected, and yet such would have been more desirable to him. It was not cowardice that made him dislike this passage of arms. He felt deeply hurt that, in order to pass a test of courage, he was confronted with the despised gladiator sword, that he was forced to cross Caesar's sword with such blades. Unspeakable bitterness constricted his heart, but then the vein of anger swelled in him, and furiously he advanced on the gladiators.

"Come on, bogeymen of the arena, and rehearse an honest sword between the ribs!" he cried, and with an abrupt leap was just before the six. Booming sounded shield and weapons in the massive impact, and already one of the attackers rolled on the ground. This was followed by a second, even before the surprised had made a sword stroke. But now a furious fight began. Shield to shield closed, the four penetrated on Equitius, furious by the fall of two comrades; for they had not been hired to fight, but only to cope with Equitius by superiority and to disarm. But it had turned out differently. Snorting with rage, the legate broke through the closed line with a rattling impact this time as well, and again a gladiator rolled over the embankment of the Limes down into the weeds, where he remained lying in oblivion.

The others were shocked; screaming they fled together with their leader into the darkness of the night, leaving Equitius as the victor with the fallen.

He had cleaned the blood from his sword on the cloak of one of the dying men and, filled with rage, thrust it back into its scabbard.

Noble anger spasmed in his soul, and had it not been for cowardice, he would have returned to Carnuntum. Only this misgiving induced him to persevere. Gradually he became calmer and more inclined to seek and find excusable reasons even for the gladiatorial fight.

His self-love felt flattered by the victory, and the insult he had received appeared to him in a milder light.

Men with stretchers came and removed the three fallen men in profound silence.

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Then Equitius thought he heard a voice from within the earth; he listened and heard the words: "Do you still seek Mithras? Follow the blue fire and knock three times with sword pommel at the Seven Times Closed Gate!"

A silent shudder came over him when he heard this.

A blue flame had risen from the vegetation on the left of the Limes and had apparently approached the legate, but then had taken its way through the bushes towards the Danubius and had then flared up powerfully in front of the rocky outcrops and suddenly died out. With a beating heart Equitius had followed it.

An iron gate closed the entrance of a cave here. Three blows with the sword pommel at it thundered terrifyingly with force.

Then Equitius heard the same voice from before shouting within the gate, "Who throbs so impetuously at Mithras' rock gate?"

"Open, Marcus Equitius it is, Magister Armorum and Caesar's Legate!"

"We don't know him! Another one is beating!" it sounded back from the closed door.

For a while Equitius stood perplexed. Had not Licinius spoken of the soldier-god, and was not the Prefect a centurion? Yes, he would have to leave that rank at the gate, Equitius thought and pounded for the second time.

"Who knocks so impetuously at Mithras' rock gate?" the voice asked another time.

"The legenary Equitius!" he answered, meaning to hit the right.

"We don't know him; it's another one who's beating!" again resounded from the iron gate, which rested firmly on its hinges.

Equitius recoiled stunned. In a flash, thoughts were now racing through his head. Then he remembered a word that the Aedile had once used when he first told him about Mithras. Quickly he sprang toward the iron gate, and once again it thundered with the pommel of his sword.

"Who throbs so impetuously at Mithras' rock gate?" it sounded for the third time.

Then the legate cried, "Marcus Equitius it is who walks in darkness and seeks the light of Mithras."

With a loud sound the gate burst open and bright light blinded Equitius so that he closed his aching eyes. Suddenly he felt himself seized by many arms at once, disarmed and bound, while a black cap was quickly pulled over his eyes, preventing him from seeing. Seized by two burly men on either side, he was forced to follow willy-nilly.

The room where this took place was a moderate-sized vestibule, from which a second door led only into the inner cave, the actual sanctuary of Mithras. In this vestibule the bound person was led around for a longer time in a criss-cross manner, in order to cause in him the illusion of a longer wandering through cave rooms and corridors.

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Then, with a great noise, the gate leading into the inner cave was opened, and upon passing through it, the neophyte was told that he had arrived at the leaden gate. This happened six times more, because one and the same door was called by Equitius the tin, the iron, the ore, the copper, the silver and finally the golden gate. Arrived before the golden gate, the question was put to him whether he still insisted on becoming one of the Milites Mithrae, and only after he answered in the affirmative, he was also led through this.

Entering the hall, he heard the request to bow his head, for he was standing before the invincible image of Mithras, which he was soon to behold.

Equitius bowed his head in silent prayer. Deep silence enveloped him.

Then a serious chorale, carried by deep male voices, began a song of consecration and entered the mind of the legate, which it deeply shook.

The words of the chant were:

*"Mithras! Never conquered, protector of the Roman army,
Hear the prayer of thee tremble through the sacred cavern!
Joyfully one thanks for your warmth, and longingly pleads the other;
Protection and help from You asked still no one in vain!
Consolation and answer found consecrated still in the Holy Realm; -
Freedom Thou givest to captives, so rejoicing they greet their homeland,
Unscathed you lead in a battle of swords whirling
Thine to victory, that the battle prize may crown them:
Grant the seeker divine guidance to the ultimate goal,
Wreath with laurel his head at the gate of the eternal hall."*

The chorale had faded out, a few more echoing chords, then silence. Equitius was deeply moved. Then he felt his eyes freed from the cover, suddenly the cap had been pulled off his head.

Astonished, he looked around.

A gloomy cave, sparsely illuminated by dim light, surrounded him. In front of him, on the back wall of the cave, stood seven small stone altars in a row, on each of which burned a blue-flickering sacrificial flame.

Behind them he saw a crude stone image, chiseled in unfinished forms, covering the cave wall. It was a youth fighting with a bull.

The youth seemed to be wrapped in a wrinkled cloak, a Phrygian cap covered his upward looking head. He put his left knee on the bull's back, and the bull, succumbing to the pressure, almost collapsed in its hind feet. The young man had also bent down the horns of the bull with his left hand and with his right hand he had thrust the sacrificial knife into the animal's neck up to the handle. Many other mysterious stone images surrounded this group, which filled Equitius with astonished horror.

He thought he was alone, but then he noticed seven men, in silent company, approaching the altars. With astonishment he noticed that on each

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of their heads a blue flame was flickering, as well as that each of them was a well-known personality, whom he least expected to find here. In front, as Pontifex maximus, strode Petronius, who was followed by Licinius and the others. They did not seem to pay attention to the legate and passed him by; then they stepped in front of the altars, Petronius in front of the middle one.

After a short silent prayer, each of the seven sacred men had now sprinkled a few grains of incense into the flickering sacrificial flame of his altar, whereupon the rising smoke of Mithras soon veiled the stone image with bluish ringlets.

Now the seven sacral turned on Equitius, and Petronius, in a voice apparently uncertain with emotion, said to Equitius:

"My son! The venerable fathers found thee worthy of consecration; thou standest before him who has the power to confer it, before the prefect of the Milites and pontifex maximus of Mithras; bow thy head in reverence!"

The still bound legate did so with the solemn mood befitting such a moment. Petronius, too, with his face flushed under the crown-like metal helmet from which the blue fire flickered, seemed moved; his voice was about to fail him, his eyes watered. and his gait and standing were unsteady.

After some hesitation, apparently the good Petronius had struggled for composure, he continued in the speech turned to Equitius:

"By virtue of the power conferred upon me by Mithras himself, by virtue of the power conferred upon me by the worthy brothers by their free choice, by virtue of the power conferred upon me by my high office, I consecrate thee a Raven, and at the same time confer upon thee the second degree, that of a Secret in Mithras! This because you passed the tests better than the venerable fathers presupposed. Take off his fetters, that he may receive the consecration free and unbound!"

Equitius was freed from the fetters and sank to his knees before the venerable Pontifex maximus.

Swaying so that two sacral had to support him - Petronius had prepared himself worthily enough for the sacred act - the prefect of the Milites poured out a small shallow sacrificial bowl filled with the blood of a sacrificial animal above the head of the neophyte, to which he quietly stammered the words: "As the invincible Mithras fertilized the earth with sacrificial blood, so that ears of corn sprouted from the sacrifice, so may you also consecrate yourself to Mithras as a sacrifice, may the baptism of blood fertilize you, so that new life may sprout from death! Thou, who art now a Raven and a Secret, think of death! Arise!"

Equitius had risen. At that moment he saw flashing before his eyes a sword which Petronius had hitherto concealed in the fold of his toga, and felt the cold iron touch his forehead. The surprised man also saw Licinius take the sword from the hand of the staggering prefect, support him, and strike his

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forehead instead.

But before Equitius was clearly aware of what had happened in a flash, he felt himself seized by powerful arms and yanked backwards. Startled, he wanted to take a step backward to avoid falling, but his heel hit an obstacle and he sank. Shuddering, he realized that it was a tomb into which he was sinking, for the heavy stone that formed the tomb's ceiling was already crunching in the joints. The darkness of the tomb surrounded the stunned man.

The seven sacred had stepped back to their seven altars, and the brothers gathered in the background silently surrounded the tomb.

Then the following chorale began:

*"Eternal times, O mortal, before you rise to the light of day
Eternal time, you stay in Aide's kingdom:
What then remains to life? An infinitely small thing,
Barely a dot, perhaps, or what is smaller still.
Short is the life crowded together, and the little itself is
Empty of enjoyment and more bitter than hostile death:
Flee therefore the storms of deceptive life, And haste like Equitius,
Rome's choice son, to the port of rest.
Come and pluck for wreathing adornment from the countryman's fields
Sprouting ears of corn for adornment above the looming grave,
Consecrating also on it the swelling berries of the vine,
That the earth of the tomb may be wetted with lovely water,
Sleeping into the hill; for also with the deceased in Hades,
Even in Pluto's domain you find rewarding thanks."*

The chorale had fallen silent. Silently, the brothers had walked around the tomb seven times, then stood in a circle around it, solemnly, silently. Also the seven sacred ones, each in front of his altar, stopped in dignified silence.

Now the gate opened, which led in from the vestibule, to let in a strange crowd. They were the female Mithras comrades, the "lionesses". They too had seven female sacral at their head, and these consisted of none other than the proconsul Agrippina and her friends. Here, too, Agrippina outshone not only the other "lionesses" but also her six closer comrades in dazzling splendor. She was wrapped like an Amazon only in lion skins, which sparsely covered her beautiful body and calculatingly showed her proud beauty. Precious emeralds took the place of eyes in the lion's heads, and golden claws held the natural ones in place. Armed she was with bows and arrows, flashing with gold and jewels, in a quiver that could hardly have been surpassed in preciousness. If Livia, the wife of the prefect Marinius, Julia, the quaestress, as well as the other friends of the princess, appeared in rich jewelry, Agrippina's splendor they had not been able to even approach. They, too, were clad in real lion skins

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and were anxious to make the boldest use of the freedom of the Amazon dress. Only Lyvia had disdained to imitate the Amazon dress like a dancing slave. The other lionesses were more or less slightly aproned, but their lion skins were only painted wool.

With feigned dignity and devotion the lionesses had moved in, rather more fitted to the florealia than to the serious Mithras grotto, and had thus reached the place where the sacral were standing in a gallantly challenging dance step.

Once there, the seven female sacral laid a wreath of ears of grain and grapes on the tomb slab and poured a horn full of wine over it. This sacral act, however, they accompanied with a play of facial expressions and gestures which showed only too clearly how the meaning of the symbolic ceremony was not only highly indifferent to them, but also completely foreign to them. It must have been quite other motives than those of piety which had made the lionesses cross the threshold of the Mithraeum.

After the women had thus decorated the grave and offered the sacrifice for the dead, they now also circled the grave seven times and sang this chorale:

*"Lacking the power of the face, the holy consecration no less,
You descended blindly to the dead, deserted by the sword.
Double consecration donates the goddesses! Before your eyes
In eerie tomb dwindle away covering darkness;
Unstabbed return to life, and not with the tongue,
Nay, with the gazing eye praise the consecration's success!"*

After the chorale had faded away and the seventh round had ended, now also the lionesses had placed themselves around the grave, so that beside each brother a sister came to stand. The female sacred did the same, and so Agrippina stood next to the staggering Petronius.

Solemn silence all around.

Temple slaves had quietly entered to light many-armed candelabras and pendant lights, to erase all traces of somber mourning, and to give the grotto a cheerful festive dress by quickly applied floral decorations. Brothers and sisters wove rosaries into their hair, interwoven with laurel and oak leaves, and the women furthermore wrapped their bodies with threads of vine leaves and ears of corn.

Now the covering stone was rolled from the grave.

Equitius straightened up. Then Agrippina and Petronius stepped next to the grave, extended their hands over it and helped the legate, blinded by the bright light, to leave it.

As they did so, Petronius spoke with a heavy tongue turned toward the

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relief of Mithras: "Thou who grantest battles and victories and honors wounds, O, Mithras, Thine is the right to give life, and to take it!"

Agrippina kept her glittering eye more fixed on Equitius than on the stone god, and lightly uttered the misunderstood profound words, "Thou who art producing children and fruits in abundance, fair Isis, Thine is the right to give life, to take!" Equitius, violently shaken by the meaningful earnestness, the powerfully moving choruses of the sacred action, was, as the tomb lid lifted, suddenly torn from his consecrated mood. On his right the tear-stunned Petronius, on his left the lecherous woman. High blush covered his face, but his tongue remained silent. Agrippina had not understood this blush, but interpreted it according to her wishes and was satisfied.

A chorus of jubilation now roared through the hall, sung unitedly by the brothers and sisters, as Equitius emerged from the tomb.

He was now clad in helmet and shield and sword, and with the red sagum of the legate, he soon stood before the pontifex maximus. But the latter's strength was visibly waning; a look seeking help met Licinius' eyes. The latter then came to the side of the exhausted man to complete the consecration.

In a long speech he explained the duties and rights of a consecrated man to the newly admitted, and finally demanded from him the solemn oath on the pontiff's sword.

Equitius drew his blade. Petronius tried to do the same, but it was only with the help of the Aedile that he managed not only to draw his ceremonial sword, but also to bring it into the prescribed position.

In solemn silence, Equitius recited with Licinius the oath formula which committed him to the Mithraic community by earth and water, by air and fire, and made him one of the *Milites Mithrae*.

Now the pontiff gave him the kiss of consecration, but he did it silently; a mild tongue lashing might have deprived the worthily prepared one of speech.

But also the brothers and sisters had to swear the oath of allegiance to the newly admitted.

Swords flew clashing from scabbards, bows and arrows clattering from quivers. A thronging crowd swarmed around the open grave, over which the Mithras community formed a roof with their weapons, as if to protect the newly won brother from a second fall into the same.

Eerily sounded the oath formula, which was spoken now by all at the same time:

"You rock, born of Mithras, hear our oath, be a thousandfold grave to us if we violate it.

Firmly and faithfully as brothers and sisters we vow to each other support, shield and protection, in joy and sorrow, in life and death, at sea and on land, in war and peace, and rather to suffer death than to leave the brother, the sister in distress. This be vowed by Jupiter in the air, by Pluto in Hades, by Vulcanus in fire, by Neptune in water; Hecate, hear this vow!"

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After a brief soundless pause, the weapons lowered, then the swords flew rattling back into their scabbards, bows and arrows into their quivers.

All rushed upon the newly admitted to give him the brother's or sister's kiss, and it was especially the sisters who performed this act of consecration with impetuous enthusiasm. A brotherly kiss, received from the declared favorite of Caesar, was not so bad; that had been made clear to everyone.

Agrippina did not spare her sisterly embraces either, she obviously forgot time and place.

The legate's love for her had grown cold, and now he was aware of the fetters she had forged around him. Cold horror gripped his heart, he thought of Schwanhild. And yet! - These words of his faithful nomenclator twitched in his soul, and he pressed the princess stormily to his heart, which brought a blush of shame to his face because of this lie. Agrippina was mistaken a second time today, for she also interpreted this blush differently.

It was not lost on the mischievous Licinius how little pleasure this reunion gave the Legate; he had a vague notion of it. But he cared little. He was content with the perception and took pleasure in the Legate's embarrassment. Therefore he also let Agrippina have her way, without freeing Equitius from her by more rapid development of the ceremony. Thus a profound silence fell. All eyes rested on the couple, a certain impatience took hold of the Mithras community, especially the lionesses; they were already looking forward to spreading this event in Carnuntum. No one thought of the oath of secrecy, and even if they did?

Finally the Proconsulin became aware of it. Far from feeling affected, she was flattered by the thought that no one had dared to disturb her; she once again pressed Equitius to her bosom in a long embrace and exclaimed almost with defiant defiance: "So be greeted once more by the lioness, you, the only one of these who is not only in the game, but really a lion!"

The enervated Roman world had long since learned to endure such things; it would have occurred more quickly to a stone to rebel against such behavior. A storm of applause broke out, as if Agrippina had spoken an earth-shattering word.

Now Licinius brought the celebration to a close.

After he had taught the newly admitted the passwords and signs of recognition, as well as the "great sign of distress and help" and had still performed various ritual ceremonies, he spoke the final word: "The work is done, let everyone remember his duty!"

The vestibule of the Mithraeum was bustling with activity, but gradually the room cleared, for groups of people had already started on their way back.

Equitius and Licinius stood apart in a cave niche in deep conversation.

The Legate's messages made the Aedile's voice reflective. Equitius, almost ashamed, had mentioned his failed legation in Stilfrida and regretted that he

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had not been granted to follow the trail of the enigmatic cloak-bearer. But in the course of the conversation he had told the Aedile about the divine veneration that the three armed battle maidens received from the people, also about the miraculous rescue of the king's daughter.

Then the Aedile had listened and spoke after a long pondering:

"So the king's daughter was saved, and you saw her yourself? - Hat, hm, hm! - The slave Lydia was stolen from the Edone by the adventurer - hm - kidnapped by the cloak-god through the air, I wanted to say. - How wonderful are the ways and deeds of the gods!" After some thoughtful nodding of the head, the Aedile continued, "Your tale of the king's daughter has distracted me from the goal. You, my brother, investigate further; you still lack the god's trail."

With that, the two stepped out of the alcove.

Licinius knew that he was right; Erchantaug was not a god. But nevertheless he had to stand up for his divinity, for since he was also on the other side of the Danubius, he was beyond the reach of the Aedile. For a long time Carnuntum had not been frightened by any new haunting, and already the Aedile hoped that the abduction of the king's daughter had been the real purpose of the ghostly activity. Soon he had completely calmed down with these thoughts and joined the few still present to start the homeward journey with them.

Among them were Equitius and Agrippina.

A stately retinue of slaves had waited for the Pronconsulin's return with a magnificently decorated palanquin in front of the grotto.

The procession started to move, opened by torchbearers. On the right of the litter walked Equitius, on the left the Aedile.

Barely a hundred paces had been taken when a wild din rumbled through the nightly meadow; weapons clanged, horses stamped, dogs howled, and shrill shouts of men's and women's voices were clearly audible. The roar approached with the haste of the storm wind.

Suddenly across their path raced a band of fifteen horsemen, accompanied by two huge white dogs; two white ravens sailed around the helmeted head of the leader. This was the Cloaked God, as Licinius named him.

The procession whizzed by and disappeared over the Limes. Gradually the noise died away. Three riders, however, stopped at the Limes, yelling goodbye to the departing twelve. Thereupon they rode around Agrippina's crowd with wild shouting and finally disappeared in the rocky cleft not far from the just abandoned Mithras grotto.

Gripped by a pale fright, Agrippina's slaves, the torchbearers as well as the men who carried the litter, stared after the ghostly spooks, which disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. The train was in disorder, and Equitius perceived how Agrippina's slaves showed great inclination to flee. He wanted

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to rush to the head of the train to restore order and prevent the worst, but Agrippina had seized him by the arm with the strength of despair. Pale and trembling, the lioness could not command her tongue, a pleading look from a fearful face met the legate.

"Those were the three Megairas, the Furies, of Stilfrida!" cried the Legate, blanching. "And the other was the Cloaked God!" retorted Licinius, who ran to the head of the procession instead of the Legate to calm the people.

Equitius wanted to say words of comfort to the frightened princess, but he was too moved by the sight of those pleading for help to speak. Only a warm pressure of the hand was all he could manage. His resentment of before was gone, he saw only the weak woman in her touching helplessness, and the former fire of passion rose again in his heart with bright blaze.

But it was denied to him to give himself up to the again inflamed passion. New horrors were to occur.

A blinding blue light flashed from the chasm where the ghostly horsewomen had disappeared. Licinius as well as Equitius wanted to have a look. The princess, seized by supreme fear, with wringing hands and watering eyes, begged the two not to leave her alone with her slaves, who would take flight and leave her helpless.

Equitius under the spell of reawakened passion, Licinius goaded by the desire to appear to the proconsul's wife and thus to himself as an unsurpassable Aedile, both were determined to dare the utmost, though the Aedile's courage wavered precariously.

To spur himself on, he called out to his friends, "are we not Milites Mithrae? Are the invincible Sun Sword, and the never-missing Sun Arrows not ours? Are you not, royal Agrippina, the first of the lionesses? Up! Follow us, lioness! Think of the glory of brave deed, of triumph before Caesar!"

Agrippina still hesitated. A look, in which fear and hope, anxiety and trust were reflected truly and artlessly, shone from the pale face of the princess, which was pale and colorless despite the reddish torchlight. Then Equitius wrapped his left hand around the quivering woman as if protecting her, tore his sword from its scabbard and cried: "Never will I leave you, princess, as long as this fist is still able to grasp the sword! Follow us, princess! To win the Limes, we must pass that cave!" Without expecting any further word from her, he called to the people to resume the way.

Through entangled bushes and herbs, over ditches and half-cut tree trunks, the procession moved, under continuous encouraging shouts from the Aedile as well as the Legate.

But Agrippina was difficult to reassure. "Close your eyes, Princess, soon we shall be over," Equitius spoke to her; but with a fixed eye she gazed steadfastly after the fearful blue light. Then he tore the sagum from his armpit and threw it over her head.

They had reached the cave.

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A wide cavern could be seen through the narrow gap; ghostly light illuminated the room. What it offered could make even the bravest tremble.

Above the very blue fire that lit the cave, a dark foaming liquid was bubbling in a hanging cauldron, which smelled like blood vapor. In front of it stood a terrible weaving loom; the long beams of lances, the winches of dead men's bones, the woven spinning neither linen nor wool, but translucent as of human skin and dripping with blood; grayish skulls, however, dangled underneath as weights on the loom. The ghastly loom whirred and hummed, at which the three Valkyries wove with bloody hands, an arrow hissed as a weaver's shuttle drove through the web, and a flashing sword struck the enclosure tightly. In addition, the weights and the structure rattled in gruesome tones.

The ghastly action, however, was accompanied by this eerie chant:

*„Aufziehen! Aufziehen!
Zum Gerichte an Rom!
Die Pfeilwolken fliegen
Am wimmernden Webbaum,
Es regne Blut!
Spannet auf Spieße
Das Wundengewebe
Den römischen Räubern,
Schießet, Schwestern,
Den blutigen Einschlag
In Zettel mit Zauber
Zur Rache an Rom!*

*"Wind up! Wind up!
To the judgment of Rome!
Clouds of arrows fly
On the wailing Weaving-Tree,
Let it rain blood!
Stretch on skewers
The wounded tissue
Of the Roman robbers,
Shoot, sisters,
The web with blood,
The warp with magic,
For revenge on Rome!*

*Wir weben Gewebe
Aus Menschengedärmen,
Im Zettelaufzug
Von Menschenschädeln;
Wir weben Gewebe
Vom Haar der Häupter
Verruchter Römer,
Als schießenden Einschlag
Am fliegenden Pfeil;
Wir weben Gewebe
Mit zaglosem Zauber
Aus Zettel und Einschlag
Schicksalsschaffend
Mit blutigen Händen
Zu blutiger Tat!*

*We weave fabric
From human intestines,
In the warp
From human skulls;
We weave fabric
From the hair of the heads
Of wicked Romans,
Like the shooting impact
Of a flying arrow;
We weave fabric
Of reckless magic
A message of impact
Fate-creating
With bloody hands
To bloody deeds!*

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*Die Tritte sind Spieße
Im Blute geblinket,
Die Schiffchen sind Pfeile
Vom Blute gelabet,
Und Schwerter schwirren.
Trunken vom Bluttrunk
Zum schlimmen Einschlag
Fest in die Fäden
Des Gewebes der Wal!*

*Aufziehn! Aufziehn!
Zum Gerichte an Rom!
Die Pfeilwolken fliegen
Am wimmernden Webbaum,
Es regne Blut!
Wir weben Gewebe
Mit zaglosem Zauber
Aus Zettel und Einschlag
Schicksalsschaffend
Mit blutigen Händen
Du blutiger Tat!"*

*The treads are skewers
Flashing in blood,
The shuttles are arrows
Labelled with blood,
And swords are whirring.
Drunk with blood
The dire impact
Firmly in the threads
Of the fabric of Walhalla!*

*Wind up! Wind up!
To the judgment of Rome!
Clouds of arrows fly
On the wailing Weaving-Tree,
Let it rain blood!
We weave fabric
Of reckless magic
A message of impact
Fate-creating
With bloody hands
To bloody deeds!"*

Blinded by sense-shattering terror, the Aedile and the Legate stared down through the rockhole into the crevice, where the ghastly weavers accompanied their horrifying doings with baleful singing. Now and then the blaze flared up under the cauldron decoction, and it seemed as if it filled the whole room, where then the dreadful ones seemed to float as if in the fire, as if this was their true element.

Agrippina gave a shriek of terror. In spite of the horrible song echoing in her ears, feminine curiosity had won and she had dared to look out from under the sagum into the cave. The pallor of death covered her face, unrestrained fear distorted it into a rigid grimace, then shivers of death trickled through her bones and like a corpse she sank back into the cushions of the palanquin.

Equitius and Licinius stood pale as if rooted to the spot. For a moment more the slaves wavered, then they cried out confusedly to each other to save themselves, and ran away, as well as they could run, toward Carnuntum. The slaves had flung the torches far from them, which smoked out here and there from the bushes. Then even the litter bearers lost heart. With a hoarse roar of fear they threw the palanquin from them and ran after their comrades. In the fall, the litter had pulled Equitius down into the damp grass, and unresisting, the unconscious lioness rolled into the bushes.

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Only Licinius stood motionless like a statue.

With difficulty the Legate Equitius worked his way out from under the weight of the heavy litter and first put his weapons back in order, as was the soldier's duty. Then he called upon the Aedile to help him render assistance to Agrippina.

Still the ghastly blue light shone from the cave, still the frenzied chant shrilled through the darkness with force.

The discarded torches had burned out in the damp vegetation, and so the legate had no other choice but to take Agrippina in his arms like a child and head for the Limes at random. The well-groomed skin of the fainting woman came off badly enough during this retreat through the bushes on an unlit, undreamed-of path. In the midst of it the resolute pushed with his lifeless burden through many a thorny bush, and many a scrawny branch carved a memory mark into the skin of the beautiful Proconsulin.

Far ahead Licinius hurried. His plan was to show the legate the right way by shouting; this he told the gate guard, when they opened the gate for him after having exchanged slogans. A few legionaries were about to hurry to meet the legate when he came hurrying along the Limes with the proconsul's wife in his arms.

In the guardroom of the Porta principalis dextra the legate left Agrippina under the protection of the aedile and went out again to the place of the accident with all the legionaries the gate guard could spare.

The haunting was over, the blue light extinguished. Agrippina's palanquin still lay in the same place, untouched, as it had been left.

After a thorough search of the unhealthy place, Equitius returned with the soldiers carrying the litter.

The princess had also recovered. Wrapped in the red sagum of the legate, she boarded the litter, but the legate had difficulty in persuading the legionnaires by rich promises that they would carry the Proconsulin's litter to the Hibernum Castrum. This was a service that did not belong to soldiers.

So they went through the gloomy silent streets of the civilian city.

They had not yet gone far when a procession of armed men and torchbearers met them, led by the tribune Marcellianus, Agrippina's son. Returning slaves had reported accidents in the Hibernum Castrum of the princess and exaggerated them to the point of fairy tale, so that only with the deployment of an important crew did Marcellianus dare to bring help to his mother.

Cool was the greeting between mother and son. Although Marcellianus was heartily glad to be relieved of any heroic duty, he nevertheless blanched with displeasure at being indebted to Legate Equitius.

He approached the superior and expressed his and his father's gratitude in smooth, well-placed speech. Equitius replied with dignified but terse words.

Now the slaves who had come with him were to continue carrying the

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litter. But Agrippina wanted it differently. She sent them home, and demanded that Equitius and his team should escort them to the Hibernum Castrum, so that the good soldiers would not lose their wages.

Gratingly, Marcellianus departed.

Thus the Hibernum Castrum was reached. The Proconsulin thanked her rescuer warmly as she bid him a touching farewell. Then the gates closed behind the homecomers.

Chapter Twelve

Suntarolt the Hagestalde

Cheerful hustle and bustle and diverse amusements enlivened the women's gathering, the Frauengaden, in Stilifrida's royal palace.

Yesterday had been the important Mihila-thing, and there, according to old custom, the Lady Queen had given her maidens and her wives a light feast, and solemnly lit the great fire in the women's hall, with which the parlor gathering began.

The windows, which had been open during the summer, had been boarded up and the structure had been blocked with moss and clay, so that the fierce North wind, which drove around the raised rafters of the gables, searching for the usual entrance with whistling and howling, rattled angrily at the beams; but it was of no use to him, for the homebuilder had done his job well.

Outside it had become autumn.

But it was cozy in the Frauengaden. The brown wooden walls were covered with blue cloth-like wallpaper to make the room more friendly; the sooty beams of the ceiling had also been given a fresh coat of varnish so that they shone as if they had just been watered.

Precious wax candles illuminated the chamber next to the bright fire under the chimney.

Frau Gotelind and the king's child sat in high-backed chairs next to the warm fireplace, and the others on the chests, which were set up like benches along the walls of the room. In front of each of them were looms for weaving a mighty skirt, and their spindle whorls spun like maidens at a harvest dance.

However, there were other things in the barn that moved more eagerly than the spindles, and these were the women's tongues. And there was plenty of material that they spun into yarn.

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Not all of the spinners were the queen's servants; many an honest burgher's household was among them, and this was a much-praised favor, for the queen's rooms were not for ordinary people's wives and children. He had to have a clear "Stein im Brett", be in very good graces, he whose wife or sweetheart was allowed to spin her skirt in the women's gallery of the Palace.

The parlors at Frau Gotelind's were also so wonderful; what creepy fairy tales were to be heard there, that one looked timidly at the door, when the wind-wolves howled outside, wondering if perhaps a moss woman would enter or even the "Allerleirauh"!*

Yes, and the great Mihila-thing, where the king had to jump on his steed after the sacrifice and shout between earth and sky: "Dead and living before the court!" It had gone well; the king had begun the call after he had jumped up from the ground, and had completed the call even before he touched the back of the steed. A good omen!

And what was there not to see in the good Stilifrida! There were people, hardly to be counted, and merchants and traders from far away. Men, said to be from the land of Egypt, had brought bulls for breeding, others horses, and sheep with long silky hair, and strong goats, and even more of the animals of unfamiliar foreign species. Also minstrels had been there and had shown many a secret art.

There was talk about all this, and it was therefore not surprising that some of the king's warriors were scheming to find a pretext to spend a furtive hour in the women's gallery. And it was no small sacrifice that such a one then made, for then he missed full tankard of the king's treasure, because in the Frauengaden there was only milk and bread, and if it came up, honey and cake.

In spite of all this, however, the women in the Frauengaden were not entirely satisfied today; they remembered with a touch of envy the king's chamber, where the king's guests were feasting, and not only with the empty memory of yesterday's feast day. Singers and minstrels were over there, and the women thought that the men wouldn't miss anything if the king sent over a minstrel.

For a long time a whisper went through the rows, until finally one dared to express the wish of all; it was Traganta, one of the favorite maidens of Frau Gotelind; she rose and spoke: "It is really too sad, the lot of the women, good Madam Queen! We sit here so lonely, while over at the Lord King's the men have all kinds of amusement. When the midday meal is over, we are allowed to give each of them a full drinking horn, and in return they tell us that the roast venison was juicy and the cake crumbly; otherwise they know nothing. But no sooner have we left the hall than the dumb can talk and the grumpy can laugh!

* "Allerleirauh", or "All-Kinds-of-Fur" is a Grimm's Fairy Tale where a princess has to dress all in fur to hide her beauty.

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It is too hard! And this shall be the thanks for burnt fingers and scalded arms! Good Madam Queen, let the Lord King ask to send a singer to our Stubeten!"

"Please, please, good queen," they all shouted and looked gratefully at Traganta, who took credit for her courageous word.

For some time the queen let herself be asked. Traganta had said nothing that the queen had not secretly wished for, but old custom prevented the women from lingering in the men's hall after the meal, when the tankards were circling. No one could prevent her from sending a singer over, but the exception should not become the rule.

At last she gave in, but intended to tease her maidens with an obstacle; she said: "You think this is so easy! Whom then shall I send to the king? Is it customary for a nosy maiden to enter the king's chamber late after the sun has set?"

But Frau Gotelind said this with such a friendly smile that they were startled.

"Oh, dear Queen, I'll get the messenger!" cried another maiden. "I'm sure I'll find Randmar the Bear outside the door. He likes to sit here in the hemp and wait for every opportunity to be called. How angry he will be if someone other than himself is called!"

The queen smiled. But when one of the other spinners called out with a giggle: "Yesterday, when Randmar had to pluck your goose, did you also call him a bear, Adaluna? Adaluna, blushing, replied: "That was wicked, Seburga! The scoundrel came to me and mocked me that a noblewoman was plucking a goose! In Rome - so the bear-skinner thought - the ladies at the imperial court did this differently. He made a lot of speeches, so I forced him to pluck the goose instead of me. Only when he had done this impeccably, I let him go!"

"Yes, after the bear-skinner kissed you!" laughed Seburga, and the others also giggled softly.

Then Adaluna lifted her blond head, and defiantly cried to her tormentor, "Well then, yes, and yes again! Is he not my fiancé, and did not the good Queen herself give me the bride's treasure? I did no wrong and need not deny it! But that you guard me like Heimdall his quivering bridge, this I know only now!"

Frau Gotelinde approved of the choice of the messenger, and also allowed Adaluna to let her Randmar enter the Frauengaden, but he was to redeem this favor by a story he himself experienced.

Joyfully Adaluna hurried to look for the messenger. Indeed, Randmar was standing next to the door in the castle courtyard, leaning against the wall with his arms folded, his eyes turned towards the chasing clouds. He did not notice her. This annoyed her.

"Did they not steal any of the stars from you?" she called to him. Then he was startled and rushed towards his fiancée, but she was very busy and gave the queen's order without giving her favor to the marshal. This was to be the punishment for not hearing her coming; if he brought the singer, she could

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still show him the queen's favor. So she thought, and wished to return to the gathering.

"And not a word for me, Ada?" said Randmar sadly, looking into the girl's mischievous smiling face.

"It is known to you, Randmar," said Adaluna with comic earnestness, "I am on duty!" The door closed again behind the girl.

"I am on duty! Roman murder and Walhalla fire!" cried the marshal, stamping in anger. "O, you women! Because I had to use this word once, now I hear it daily!"

Angrily he strode across the castle courtyard without looking back. The scabbard of his sword struck the ground heavily, as if its weight had tripled.

There he stopped. He pushed back his helmet and rubbed his forehead, as if he wanted to think about something.

"Yes, that's how it was!" he said to himself. "So it is:

*"Do not trust a girls' trustworthy word,
Do not trust a ladies' trustworthy word,
Her heart was made on a swinging wheel,
Fickleness dwells in woman's delight."*

He sighed thoroughly and looked wildly around him. Then he raised his fist menacingly against the door of the women's hall.

"You shall pay for that! I am the Marshal, mark you! Now the good singers have no time, so I will send you another, my little dove. Roman murder and Walhalla fire!"

Very angry, he put his helmet back in the right position and hurried, striding out powerfully, to the king's chamber.

The king shook his head in amazement when he heard that his wife Gotelinde had a desire to hear Hagestalden Suntarolt, and murmured into his beard: "A woman's desire is always unfathomable!" Then he smiled, emptied his horn, shrugged his shoulders and told the Hagestalden to go to the women's hall with the Marshal.

The old man's eyes were strange, for he had never been desired in any women's room in his life. But he was also excited.

Old gray shaggy head and beard hair grew around a wood-brown face decomposed by scars, from which gray-green cat eyes shone out wildly under white-bushy brows. Only the hair of the mop was tied up like a tower and blew above like the ornament of a helmet. Helmet and armor he despised; a bearskin was his coat and wolf skins formed his remaining garment, from which the broad white-haired chest stood out powerfully, as far as it was not covered by his shaggy beard. A massive sword, a huge primal horn, a mighty shield rich in scratches and a terribly long ash shaft, this was all his wealth and

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pride. On the naked right upper arm, however, he wore a massive iron ring firmly forged, as a sign that he consecrated himself to Odin unashamedly. ⁽¹⁾

Growling, the Monstrous rose from the mead bank after pouring the mead horn in front of him down his throat. Thereupon he wiped his dripping beard with a tip of his bearskin and growled more than he said: "You have done that badly, king; Suntarolt fits in with women like a bear to turtle doves; but you shall not say, Suntarolt is cowardly, that's why he goes to the women's room!"

Everyone laughed. Then he seized his weapons, planted himself in front of the Marshal and growled peevishly at him:

"Marshal, make it short! Blitz and blue fire! Suntarolt, it's like going to the gallows!"

Again the whole meadbank laughed. The Marshal rejoiced deeply at the trick he had played on Ada, and spoke consolingly:

"Courage, old man, courage! The queen is both very brave and mild; I bet she won't let you sit dry among the spinning whorls."

The old man shook with sheer horror when he heard the spinning whorls named; but he spoke scornfully, pounding his shield with his fist, "Courage will you, boy, teach old Suntarolt? Look at this shield, and then crawl behind the meadbank! He who rubs against old cauldrons turns black, remember that, boy. It is not courage that Suntarolt lacks, and that he never acquires; it is something else that looks like it, and that he lacks when he enters a woman's hall. But all the same! Forward, make it short, lad!"

Soon the Marshal was pounding on the door he knew well, having placed the Hagestalden in a corner so that he would not be noticed immediately.

Adaluna opened. He told her about the king's promise and that he would bring a hero to tell tales in the women's hall. Then he was a little sorry that he had done this trick, for Adaluna looked at him with delight and said, "Because you have done so well for the queen's business, she is favorably disposed toward you. Today you may be a guest at the parlour, if you can redeem yourself with one of your little tales."

Gravely affected, the lowly Marshal stared at his Ada, stamped his foot angrily, but said nothing. Now he was very sorry, but nothing could be done about it.

"Have you swallowed a hedgehog, you symbol of all Marshals?" cried the

1) The Hagestalde is one of those whom Tacitus commemorates as follows (Germania II. ch. 31):

"The bravest wear an iron arm ring - which is considered a disgrace by others - as a fetter, so to speak, until they free themselves from it by slaying an enemy (or fulfilling some other vow of bravery and heroism). Many like such garb and grow gray in this adornment, to which friend and foe point fingers. These are the ones who open every battle and always stand in the first rank - a wondrous sight! Not even in peace does their facial expression moderate to greater mildness. None of them has house and farm, nor any other business: wherever they go, they are entertained; squanderers of other people's good, despisers of their own, until at last feeble old age makes them incapable of such brazen bravery."

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girl teasingly and hurried to Frau Gotelinde to bring her the joyful news.

Then the women rejoiced, eager for new fairy tales, for they were tired of the old ones.

Crunching gravel and a mighty tapping announced the approach of the longed-for; at last there was a bear-like knocking at the door. Adaluna opened and almost sank to her knees in fright. "To the rescue, Balder and Frey and you, dragon-slaying Mihila! The Giant is coming, the Sun Eater's maker! Help me! Someone help!" so she cried; but outside stood the undefeated Suntarolt, defiant and yet again timid, in armor and weapons and fierce in appearance, for the rough North wind was tousling his ice-gray scalp.

The spinners in the hall shrieked loudly. Then Randmar's head rose above Hagestalden's armpit with a laughing, broad mouth; he made a virtue out of necessity and pleased himself in the role of a rogue. Laughing, Randmar pushed the rude journeyman into the chamber, pushed him in front of the queen's armchair, bowed low and said: "My dear queen! He who stands there is the Hagestalde Suntarolt; knowing only of battle, a rock in the storm, the wild hunter himself behind the boar, a ferryman bold as Lord Iso himself, but towards fair women a child, shy and timid. But if you, Madam Queen, let this child put a wooden nurse on this table, then you will hear miracles, for Suntarolt knows fairer tales than the bard Bragewalt. That I tell you in truth!"

Old people laughed at Randmar's speech, except Hagestalde, who sent a grim look at the smiling marshal and then turned to the queen and said:

"Blitz and blue fire! Let someone other than the Suntarolt understand what this fellow is saying about the child and the wooden nurse; it is the whirling in the brain of a Roman corrupter, like his fencing sword in the woods! It's no secret to anyone that the old man is more at ease in the horror of battle than sitting between women. But now that Suntarolt is with you, say your desire; he will do it if he can. But he will do it even better if you grant him a full tankard. He doesn't like to talk, because such useless tongue-twisters only dry his throat! So, what do you want. Madam Queen?"

"The child is already crying for the nurse!" cried the marching lord, "for the nurse with the little skirt of oak and the clasps of weeds!"

This made everyone laugh again, but made Hagestalden think. But the marshal had already patted him somewhat rudely on the shoulder and said: "You will thank me for this service; over there you would get mead, over here wine! Hoiho, old man!" Thereby he smiled wistfully and squinted at Adaluna, whether she was not already holding two drinking horns in readiness.

Now he took the shield and spear from the old man and vowed to protect him here, which Suntarolt overheard with disdain. But hoping for a good drink, he extended his hand to the marshal and shook it sympathetically.

Frau Gotelind had followed the proceedings with amusement. She knew the old man and appreciated him, so she greeted him kindly and also granted

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him the barrel Randmar had asked for. The queen also allowed the marshal to be given a drinking horn, although Adaluna thought that this would be too much of a mercy; he should consider himself lucky to be allowed to empty a horn full of goose wine.

The barrel was soon at the table and the queen now asked the old man if he was now satisfied.

Then the old man stepped uncertainly before the queen, gathered all his courage to speak back, pressed his right hand to his naked chest and said almost shyly: "That is precisely Suntarolt's grief, that he is more satisfied with you, Madam Queen, than you will be with him. He hardly dares to move, lest those trembling things there die of fear, and on top of that, think him not only a Giant, but his nine-headed great-grandmother! Blitz and blue fire! Go see a battle of whirring sword-blows and you shall experience joy from the Hagestalden, Madam Queen!"

Again they all wanted to laugh, but they fell silent when the queen said to Suntarolt with a serious, yet mild face:

"Now you have misplaced your word, my good Suntarolt! I know you well and honor you! Do you think the queen demands from you what she would impose on the Bragewalt, a blissful song of May-love? I look upon thy face, and count the commemorative runes which every battle preserves in it; I look upon thy shield, and can never count its marks of honor; I look upon thy tanned spear, and cannot fathom how many Romans' blood it required to tan so deeply! An unworthy queen of the Germans I would have to be, if I wanted to force the best of the sword-wielders to give a woman's tale! Tell us about the noise of battle, about the journeys of swift warriors, tell us what you yourself have seen. But remember, remain the same in my presence as you are in the king's chamber; as such you greeted me, as such I greeted you!"

For a while the old man had gazed at the queen in disbelief, then he rose mightily, all shyness was gone, and joyfully his eye flashed as he cried out exultantly, "Queen, this too! Haio, queen, the Roman despoilers will never forgive you! Suntarolt, thou mayest speak as thou art wont, now be thankful, thou old bear! Queen, this sword is thine, for thy mercy is more than if thou hadst saved Suntarolt from the gallows! Queen, your hand!"

The queen, smiling mildly, placed her hand in that of the overjoyed man, who pressed and shook it impetuously. She was moved by the primal outburst of emotion. She realized that from now on she could absolutely call Suntarolt's sword her own, and such swords in such times were a precious commodity.

Suntarolt gazed at the flickering fire in the face of the queen and the silently thinking Gisalhild. Finally the old man had settled down. But then Frau Gotelind seized the filled horn that Ada had handed her, raised it high and spoke kindly to the old man:

"Because it is you, Suntarolt, and no less, the German queen honors you

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with a toast according to knightly custom. This drink be well with thee!" She took a strong drink, and with a friendly look handed the horn to Hagestalden. The old man did not know what happened to him. He jumped up, knelt before the queen, pressed his right hand to his heart, and called out with a twinkling eye:

"Madam Queen! Except for our dear Lady Freya, until today Suntarolt has held all women in low esteem! Now he has learned to adore you! But now he also knows how right he was to take the iron ring and to renounce all women. Only you would have been worthy of him, but since you sit under the crown, the earth would not have given birth to you again for this old Roman destroyer, and therefore I praise Siegvater's iron ring! This drink is for you, Madam Queen!"

Then, kneeling, he drank the horn empty and carefully stored it in the folds of his robe. But to the queen he said: "Hagestalden never gives gifts as he is a treasure despiser! But this horn is Suntarolt's boon, you will never get it back!" He got up, sat back in his seat, and said to Ada:

"Girl, bring this old man a fresh horn; for this is too sacred for him to drink from on earth. But he will drink from it when he sits in Allfather's hall. There the battle maidens shall fill it for him with the mead of the blessed, which flows foamingly from Heidrun's udder!"

Ada had brought a new horn. Suntarolt stood up to fulfill the queen's desire. He put the horn out and drank it carefully empty; then he upended it on his left thumbnail to test, and said: "Madam Queen! Not a drop remains in the horn, not a word of your farewell was forgotten! You shall hear a tale, but it is not a singers'; it sounds like a hound barking next to Bragewald. But let the old man in pensive recollection first find the thread to the start of the legend."

On it he stroked his fingers through his broad beard and gazed unblinkingly into the smoldering flames of the hearth. The silence of anticipation held the women spellbound, only the spindles whirled softly.

With a mighty poker, Randmar had scraped the embers together and piled massive logs on top. Thin clouds of smoke were already curling through the crackling fire logs and were soon followed by others.

Narrow little flames followed, which grew and took off in all forms from the sooty background.

All eyes were fixed on the Hagestalden. Initially, his eyes followed the growing flames, but their gaze became more and more fixed, and at last they stared into the glow almost like glass. A strange tremor ran through his body, which gradually changed into more definite movements and grew with the increasing flickering of the fire. At times it seemed as if he were taking up a whirring sword stroke, then again as if he wanted to push the shaft or await the approach of an enemy; at the same time he growled, snarled, cursed, and

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his appearance became terrible.

No eye had turned from the old man, horror seized the spinners. His eyes grew glassier, his movements wilder, his voice louder.

Now he abruptly jumped from his seat and stood with legs spread in front of the blazing fireplace.

It had become clear to all that his spirit had been carried away into distant horizons, perhaps into the vicinity of the Godhead. Even if the horror was not diminished, it was soothed by the belief that the deity could be heard speaking from the worldly rapture.

But Suntarolt had completely forgotten his surroundings and himself. His vivid memory had deluded his senses with living beings, so that he believed he experienced again what he had already, and forced all those who saw him to follow him on the boundless flight of the waking dream.

Now the old man seemed to be engaged in conversation and listening to the speech of a fellow traveler, then he spoke as if in return speech:

*"Well said Utilo! That is what fate has decreed:
When the sun presses and Iduna sinks,
When Nikuz bends to slumber and sleep.
When Iso and Ise in fetters of ice
Shamefully languish at Agez on the Aggstein,
Then over waves the ancient frost giant arches
A great bridge of crackling ice.*

The Aggstein frightens you, you also shun Agez and Ran? - The iron ring is forged for you and you never dare Agez to grab the iron ring bearer! Hoihö, courage Utilo! This is Wachilden's Wachau, and there the Watstein towers! - Didn't Wate carry his and Wachilden's son Wieland across the holy Danube into the valley of the forging dwarves, so that he might learn to forge swords? - We follow the holy trail! Haiö!"

Now his movements became more impetuous again and his words stifled groaning gasps.

But the spinners knew well the place and the myths that Suntarolt's speech implied. Up in the whirlpool of the Danube, which never freezes, there dwelt the mighty water god Nikuz, and in the whirlpool, Holla, the wife of Nikuz. The terrible Agez never dared to touch these two. This master thief lived with his evil wife in the Aggstein, which rises steeply from the stream, surrounded by the Forest of Terrors, the Schreckenswald, through which the Schreckensbach river rushes. There the terrible one dwells in his ice castle. If he succeeds in catching the Nix and the Nixie of the Danube, Iso and Ise, he throws them into the dungeon of the Aggstein, burdened with ice chains, and walls up the Danube with ice blocks so that his prisoners cannot get free. But he is never able to defeat Nikuz and Holla. Finally he is overcome by them in

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battle, and the ice cover of the Danube - the ice bridge - breaks, and Iso and Ise emerge from his ice dungeon.

This was well known to the women, but they were also familiar with the fact that daredevils dared to cross this ice bridge. But woe to those who cross! The sacrifices of Agez the Terrible demand that the first to reach the shore be sacrificed to the god of terror. He is seized, dragged up to the Aggstein, put there on a winch in his arms and weapons, and lowered over the overhang of the rock, where he hangs suspended above the eerie abyss in the rope, until the dizziness plunges him into the depths. There the dreadful Ran awaits him, which holds his soul captive under a glass bell in the creek of horror, so that he may never enjoy the pleasures of Valhalla.

This was known to all, and therefore they felt foreboding cold horror of what Santarolt would involuntarily announce.

Then the words spoken by the Raptured One became audible again:

"Haiö! The ice shackles clink, it crunches and cracks the bridge of ice! - Up, walk Agez's bridge, Hoiho!-----You threaten, Agez? You too Ran? - Away with the net, you green beggars, away - away! - Nikuz to the aid of your man! - already the grim ghost is grabbing at us - Utilo, stop! Bring the shaft here! - Nikuz, hear the vow - Ten Romans are yours, if Santarolt the bridge of death in the back.....courage, Utilo, courage! - Soon we'll stand on the shore! - There, there - Look the hideous swirling cross-eye from ice-burned brow, - it's ours Never can you allow it, Odin, that the hideous beggars steal us from you-----Help! Help!"

Again the word became unintelligible by gasping hissing sound. But soon the hasty speech was clear again, although Santarolt seemed to be fighting a desperate battle.

"What do you want from me. Scoundrel?! Was ever an Odinsman sacrificed to the Agez? are not these enough, that out of eighty journeymen, sixty-seven were devoured voraciously by the Ran?! - Utilo also got caught in the net Utilo! . . Oh And he wore the iron ring!-----Yet you do not soften?! The thirteen be for Agez, thinkest thou?-----Scoundrel, go to the Hell!"

Grimly now the fight seemed to break out anew. The women saw themselves transported to the icy field and the mad scramble to the frozen shore. They thought they saw how sixty-seven unfortunates were crushed in the debris of the rolling floes as if in the jaws of a hideous whale; they thought they saw how the thirteen who had been saved were struggling for their lives with the terrible ice. Frozen by terror and frost, they landed but were attacked and the thirteenth - Santarolt was mastered. Shuddering the queen watches the ghastly battle of Hagestalden, which he fights with the spooky figures of his waking dream, trembling Adaluna nestled into speechless rigid Randmar, and gray horror was reflected in Gisalhild's fairy tale

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eyes. Not pale fear of death makes the fighter tremble, a hundred lives he would have given without complaint in a raging battle, only the thought of eternal languishing in Agez' ice fetters and of the loss of Valhalla's joys cramps his heart. But he is overcome, and to the doom he adds the guilt; he is disturber and peacebreaker of the sanctuary! He is caught. Gestures and howls of rage indicate this. -

"What are these ways that you lead me?" he cries furiously. "Skulls and breaking bones crack in the ice under the weight of the steps! - so will my skull one day crack under the footsteps of another? do you mean-----yet I am Odin's man, not yet has Odin's ring jumped!-----Odin and Agez! I remind you of the oath you swore to yourselves! - Curse you shameless wretches who call yourselves sacrificers! - Curse! - Curse!" ----

Again roars of rage devour the word, but the crowd of women knows that he is now led through the forest of corpses, the forest of horrors. They watch how the sacrificers drag him higher and higher up through the ice-stiffening rocky gorge, to which the tree giants are bound as if with ice belts; they see the horror of how the sacrificers, bound with arms and weapons, force him onto the swing and push him out over the depths; they shudder in horror as he hovers at a dizzy height, riding above the abyss, over shattered bones chained by ice.

The spindles rest. Trembling, everything awaits the end.

A shrill cry of fear escapes Suntarolt's gasping chest. His hands above his head, as if he were clinging to a rope, his empty gaze stares over his armpit at the presumed depth. Now he becomes calm. The berserk fury leaves him, and his countenance softens. His gaze rises upward. A prayer springs from his lips: "Odin, Father in heaven! I hang between heaven and earth in this frozen air kingdom, between winds and storms! Thine is this realm, Thine am I, Thy consecrated one! Agez, the master thief, has no right here. Send me Thy mantle, which carries me off to joyful sword-death, to the seat in Valhalla! Thou, deceiver and trickster, deceive Agez's fellow murderers, wipe out the disgrace that Agez the master thief prepares for thee!"

Now a joyful gleam lights up his eye and he rejoices: "Thanks to you, Odin! Already rescue is near! The vulture is Thy will sent!"

He lowers his head and closes his eyes to be considered dead. Then, all at once, it seems as if he were grasping the breast of a bird with both hands, a short struggle, he presses his face against the bird's fluff as if for protection, then he remains motionless. At last, his form is struck as if he has reached solid ground, his hands seem to repel the vulture, and his eyes turn to joy as if they were watching a bird take flight. Again he cheers: "Don't escape so quickly, vulture, you have saved Suntarolt from being food for the birds! The Hagestalde thanks you for his life and his arrow shot will never kill one of your race! This be Suntarolt's thanks!"

The women breathed a sigh of relief when Suntarolt was carried to the

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valley by the vulture in the saving low flight, and they hardly paid attention to his prayer of thanksgiving, which he now stammered. But when he rose wearily from the ground, he again caught everyone's gaze and thoughts.

Distraught, he looked around the circle, stroked his forehead several times with his hand, and then, smiling sheepishly, tried to empty his tarred horn once more. He handed the horn to Adaluna with the words, "Maiden, the old Roman spoiler thirsts; don't forget the gift service!" Thereupon he turned to the queen:

"Madam Queen! The old sword-wielder is not a lying storyteller; he told you at once that you will not be satisfied with him, in vain did he ponder."

But everything around him remained motionless in the spell of amazement; even Ada had not yet filled the horn. Then his turn to be amazed came; to make himself heard he called to Ada: "What are you gawking at, girl, the old Roman spoiler, as if he were a miracle? Fill his horn!" But Ada did not move yet.

The queen had gained her composure first. She told Suntarolt that he had just told a tale; no tale had ever been told more beautifully and gruesomely at the Parlor than by him today. Then, astonished, he forgot about the drink that Ada had finally given him.

But when Frau Gotelind told him what he had told and how he had behaved, he jumped up and cried out fearfully:

"Madam Queen! What you are saying, old Suntarolt has really experienced, but it was too horrible for him to put it into words, and that is why he has not yet confided it to anyone! Where did you get this tale?"

For a long time, the queen negotiated with Suntarolt about it, until he took it for granted that he himself had told the tale, for he could not remember a word he had used. Thinking about the unheard, the old man sat slumped and would almost have forgotten the drink, if the queen had not reminded him of it.

The candles had burned down and the fire was close to being extinguished.

Then Frau Gotelind and Gisalhild rose from their seats to retire to their bedchamber. To Randmar, however, the queen said jokingly: "Your little fairy, with which you were to redeem yourself today, we give to your Adaluna; redeem from her the pledge." Thereupon the two of them left the women's garden.

Randmar happily took leave of Ada and led Suntarolt back to the king's hall, while the women of the town's estates with their spindles and skirts likewise departed. The serving women and maidens of the queen, however, prepared their resting place on the chests of the women's hall.

The night was cool.

When the Marshal pulled the door of the women's room behind him and

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Suntarolt bolted the lock, both eagerly took in the refreshing coolness of the night and stopped, looking at the starry night sky. From the king's hall sounded the wild noise of an advanced drinking party, from the forest the harp of the wind in the treetops and the hoarse screeches of the owl.

Then Suntarolt slapped the Marshall's armpit in a friendly manner, then squeezed it hard and said, "Marshall! Can you tell old Hagestalden how many stars are wobbling up there, as if they had all drunk too much of the mead?"

Astonished at the strange question, Randmar replied, "Only if you count them for me."

"So Marshal!" was the other's answer, "just as often as there are drunken stars up there, the old man wonders how he howled so long in a woman's room without having gone to Hel!"

Randmar replied with a laugh: "She also lives in a woman's room!"

Then the old man fell silent, abrupt fright painted itself in his features; hastily he seized the hand of the Marshal and pulled him hurriedly away to the courtyard of the king's treasure.

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Chapter 13

Bread and Circuses

A sunlit October day showered Carnuntum with the full, colorful splendor of late autumn. The floodplain forests along the banks of the Danubius once again unfolded a brilliantly colored picture before the winter's blanket of snow banished all colors; but the lush summer green had not been able to outcompete the autumnal splendor of color. Even the sun-baked meadows feigned the freshness of early summer through the delicate pale pink of the autumn wildflower, like the face of an old woman feigning youth through makeup.

How often can such autumnal glowing colors and splendor deceive!

Who would not have wanted to see fresh blooms behind the splendor of rich Carnuntum, and yet it was only the evening glow, the autumnal splendor of color before the sinking of the sun of happiness, before the destruction of night and before the wintry twilight of oblivion. -

Today all Carnuntum had sense and understanding only for one event. For weeks it had been eagerly awaited, it had been the focus of all thoughts, all conversations, because unusual things always are.

Caesar Valentinianus wanted to grant the Carnuntians the brilliant spectacles of the arena before his departure and today was the beginning of the festive week.

The good Carnuntum people were very pleased to see the Caesar's welcome returned in this way, and they basked in the imperial grace.

That is why all Carnuntum was on its feet to hurry to the circus, which had been hastily transformed into an arena during the last weeks.

But things turned out differently than the good Carnuntians had been led to believe.

The day after the night of horror, which the Proconsulin experienced, the story of the haunting had spread all over Carnuntum in many distorted forms,

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and there was no talk of anything other than the ominous signs. From the emperor down to the last slave, everyone was frightened by it, and events like those that had already taken place at the civil forum threatened to befall Carnuntum more violently than ever. The Aedile had deployed everything to capture the dark weavers, but in vain. Although the mysterious cave was easily found the next day, there were no signs of fire, loom or blood in it. This only agitated even more the lower classes of people, and Erchantaug's speech of that memorable day back in July returned vividly to everyone's memory.

The poor, exhausted people hoped in Erchantaug, they believed in divine protection and became bolder as the patricians became more timid.

But even more mysterious things happened that night. The harbor guards reported that they had seen how the Liburne, which had been stolen earlier, had landed that night, how the twelve men of the cloak-gold, together with horses, dogs and ravens, had escaped from it, and how it was lying in its place in the harbor with its anchors cast out. Three mounted women, armed like men, received the arrival and rode out with them boldly, loudly roaring inland. And all this took place in the face of all the guards, but they were completely spellbound, unable to move, and had to let the unheard-of happen quietly.

If the authorities did not want to lose all prestige, they had to step out of the tactful preservation of a calm front so warmly advocated by Licinius, and they had to take a decisive step. This was clear to all.

The Proconsul had therefore held a secret council, in which the Curul-aedil Candusinus proposed to try the well-known remedy of the Roman state pharmacy also in Carnuntum, namely Bread and Circuses. ⁽¹⁾ The people should be offered the most pompous circus and arena games with the usual parties and feasts. The most suitable pretext would be Caesar Valentinian's thanks for the festive reception offered to him by the Marcus-Aurelian colony.

The plan, like the cunning disguise of the intentions of the same, pleased not only the Proconsul but also the emperor extraordinarily.

Immediately imperial lictors went through Carnuntum to make known by public shouting that gladiatorial and animal fights should be held at Caesar Valentinian's expense, as a sign of imperial recognition and homage.

1) Juvenal had written of the Roman people:

"Long ago, since the vote was not given to anyone.

And it had long since been given to no one, the people threw off their worries about the legions,

Fasces, supreme command and all that was formerly bestowed by voting,

Calm and modest now, they desire passionately two things only: Bread and circuses!"

Thus it came about that the people of Rome and its provinces gradually lost political importance, and precisely the most useless emperors, such as Caius, Nero, Caligula and others, were most popular by feeding the sweet rabble and lulling them with games, and even unerring and solid emperors had to resort to these reprehensible means of statecraft in order to curb pernicious eruptions of popular bestiality.

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The people cheered and stopped being dangerous. The remedy had helped.

But also Equitius was seized by fame and willy-nilly the Proconsul had to submit to it. He had his treasurer pay out an honorary gift of one million sesterces to the legendary man celebrated by the whole of Carnuntum, in order to flatter the emperor.

He also wanted to show his gratitude to the Aedile, so he summoned him.

On a rich lectus the Proconsul laid, stretched out; on a reclining bisellium the Aedile sat opposite him. It was in a chamber of the Hibernum Castrum; writing utensils lay on a table.

They had gone over all the events, the Aedile not failing to bring out the belief in a supernatural haunting, and also to encourage the Proconsul in this opinion.

"So we would have arrived, after all, at what I have already found to be an assault," said the Proconsul with a serious wrinkle in his forehead. "Now you yourself demand to make examples?"

"Very well, my prince!" replied the Aedile. "But only today! Had we begun then, what would we have left now? It is necessary to be sparing."

"What is your advice now?"

"That the best opportunity for reward and punishment has just presented itself, for encouraging and warning examples. The people rejoice, and therefore these examples will be accompanied by the most salutary success."

"You mean? Let's hear it!"

The Aedile gave a smile, then spoke, "For now the sweet rabble is appeased, Panem et Circenses, what delights in sight! - But where do we get the bestiarii* the Curul-aedil needs? No criminals are incarcerated! No prisoners of war!"

"Slaves enough for that," was the Proconsul's retort.

"That would be dangerous to do directly today."

"Why?"

Again a mischievous smile played around the corners of the Aedile's mouth as he said, "The sweet rabble might - I suppose it is not easy to suppose - but they might - suddenly remember the innocence of slaves, they might - popular desires are hard to determine - they might think that knights and patricians would not fare badly in battle with beasts either . . . That would be much to be lamented. Simply rounding up slaves and sacrificing them must not be allowed to happen, for that would be even more dangerous, but sacrifice there must be. So we must have criminals, not slaves, and soon, and many."

The Proconsul became embarrassed, and looked into the mischievously

* Bestiarii were young men who would fight either animals or other men in the arena. Gladiators were similar, but only fought other men. The Bestiarii consisted of voluntary and involuntary fighters.

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smiling face of the Aedile.

"Finding them is not a worry for the Aedile Licinius, is it?" was his hesitant reply.

"Certainly not, but I require extraordinary powers, which I ask of you, Proconsul," and again Licinius smiled.

"Speak!" gave Maximianus briefly in reply.

"My old scouts are ill-suited for this purpose, and the usual court practice is too sluggish. I need spies and scouts who will find me the criminals without a lot of questions, and for that....."

"Well?"

"And for this we need encouraging examples, but also a state of exception, which transforms the usual judicial practice into a quicker, summary procedure. When we have enough bestiarii, then the state of exception will be lifted, and the sweet rabble will have paid the bill for their own pleasure. We have made our warning example, and the patricians will thank you."

"That makes sense," said the Proconsul, nodding approvingly; whereupon he continued, "I will have the state of emergency proclaimed at once; you are installed as omnipotent until revoked, and any sentence you proclaim against criminals cannot be appealed against, either to me or to Caesar Valentinian. One more thing you shall hear. Not this trust alone shall prove to thee my gratitude for thy loyalty, which thou hast proved to the Proconsulin with the Legate in perilous hour. I have obtained that the emperor elevates you to consular rank."

Licinius was pleased, but not surprised. He expressed his thanks in fleeting words, like one who has more important things to say. The Proconsul noticed this, so he asked Licinius if the granting of the state of emergency did not satisfy him yet. Then again his smile played around the corners of the Aedile's mouth, and he spoke:

"One more thing is to be considered, my princeps. For the sake of encouragement, the confiscated goods of the criminals must be awarded to the informants, and this also requires your permission, my proconsul."

The Aedile paused with the speech, while a lurking glance grazed Maximianus. Of the promise he had made to Dorias, the sly Licinius had thought, but also of the Proconsul's avarice in fattening himself on confiscations. The Proconsul did not make a face, but neither did he make an utterance. From this the Aedile gathered that Maximianus would be won over to his proposals; he therefore continued: "You can, my princeps, dispense with the proceeds of these confiscations in favor of the encouraging example all the more easily, since they will be only small people whose property is barely able to cover the court costs. This time the sweet rabble must supply the criminals, for their own cautionary amusement. The blood of knights and patricians would be an evil seed today!"

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This made sense to the Proconsul, and he immediately made the necessary arrangements to have the people of Carnuntum notified of the decision by public proclamation. Admittedly, he knew nothing of the fact that the Tavern of the Elephant was to be confiscated.

Yes, the concern that there might be a lack of bestiarii for the arena had so defeated the avarice of the Proconsul that he had made a gift of his own slaves, the ones who had just fled and abandoned Agrippina, to the arena for the animal fight.

The people of Carnuntum had not even begun rejoicing over the eight arena days with the festivities that had just been announced to them, when a new public cry resounded through Carnuntum. This time the Proconsul's lictors announced his proclamation, and a cheer of relief went through the patricians over its contents. The rabble, however, was already reveling too much in the anticipation of what the arena would offer them to even remotely suspect what this proclamation meant to them.

That same day, Parus the innkeeper and Edone the hostess were arrested, and Dorias was awarded the Tavern of the Elephant as a reward for being informants by the state and the law. Licinius had kept his word.

No sooner had Dorias taken up her reign than she had her friend, the cithara player Sophrona, come before her and soundly flayed the poor unsuspecting girl's back with Edone's scourge. Thereupon she embraced the wailing girl tenderly and said to her: "You shall always remain my dear Sophrona, as you have been my friend until now; but never forget that now Dorias is free and your dominatrix! You know that now. But know then also, that no one will know that I whipped you. This is the proof of my goodwill. Go now; let the gate be closed and summon all the slaves and slave girls to the peristyle."

There Dorias had pillows made up for herself, in which she now lay, overloaded with Edone's ostentatious robes and jewelry, like a distinguished dominatrix. Sophrona sat at her feet and played the cithara.

To the slaves and slave girls lined up before her, the new mistress now delivered a sharp speech of punishment, in which she reproached them with all the thievery and other sins that were only too well known to her, the former companion of their fate. She then divided the crowd in front of her into two halves and had them all undress. One half had to tie the other to the pillars of the peristyle and then whip them until the wailing of the tortured filled the air. When the new mistress thought it was enough, she paused and exchanged the roles, so that the formerly whipped now had to swing the scourge. After Dorias had thus made each of the housemates remember the beginning of her reign in this simple way, they were all allowed to get dressed again.

Dorias now promised them to be a gracious dominatrix if they did their

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duty. But whoever would win her special favor, she held out the possibility of release. Thereupon she waved graciously and ordered the house gate to be opened again.

For the rest, she continued to run the inn in the style of Edone, and none of the guests noticed any change from before.

That very day Licinius found his dearly bought reward in the embraces of the charming new Schenkin.

A time of terror had now fallen upon Carnuntum. Every day brought news of new arrests, confiscations of goods and condemnations to the arena, and so it happened that Edone's fate was soon forgotten. Even the elevation of the Aedile to consular rank was lost almost undiscussed in these stirrings. And still the people rejoiced, still they longed for the arena days, like the thirsty one for the water of the oasis. As a result of the "encouraging examples", the slaves had taken possession of a true rage to acquire freedom and wealth through mostly invented accusations of their masters, and so in a few days the number of wealthy owners sentenced to the arena had risen to more than two hundred. At last the Curul-aedil Candusinus reported that he had enough of the bestiarii. However, according to plan, the tables were turned and now most of the accused were acquitted and at the same time the informers were now sentenced to the arena for slander, and thus the rage for accusations was stopped. The Proconsul also lifted the state of emergency.

But the slaves, whose masters were acquitted and returned home, suffered terribly enough, even though the actual slanderers were already trembling under lock and key, facing death in the arena. For these had shown them what they had to think of the others. The masters gave unbridled rein to their revenge, all the more so because they found themselves robbed by the ungarded slaves, and often even completely impoverished. Many gave their slaves to the arena, others mutilated theirs; many a slave may have been buried alive in the garden of the house.

Soon, therefore, Carnunt's slave population was again intimidated and forced back into its accustomed confines. In the forum as in the palaces, patricians and knights felt secure again, for the people had already sunk too low to realize what a shameful game had been played with them.

In the intoxicating pre-enjoyment of the foreseen blood spray of the arena, however, the people and the patrician, the common rabble competed with the noble rabble, and all Carnuntum feverishly awaited the arena week with growing impatience.

But not only people were needed for the fighting games.

The small supplies of lions and other beasts of prey that the circus administration had at its disposal were hardly worth mentioning for a festival play given by a Caesar; likewise the space of the circus, which now had to be expanded into an arena.

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But haste was necessary. Therefore, at imperial expense, the animal supplies of several arenas were gathered from Italy and Dalmatia and wherever else they could be found, and brought to Carnuntum with the greatest speed. With great pomp and circumstance, these animal transports moved through the streets of the city and each one was an event that was eagerly discussed by the good Carnuntum citizens for days to come.

But when one fine day three elephants and a rhinoceros, festively decorated, made their entrance into the Marcus-aurelian colony, the enthusiasm reached its peak, for no Carnunter had ever before seen such powerful animals.

In the circus, hundreds of slaves eagerly worked to transform it into an arena. The battlefield was dug deeper to protect the spectators' seats from the high jumps of the beasts. Then it was necessary to create space for the expected numerous influx of onlookers. Around the old circus building, a whole forest was piled up into scaffolds, in order to raise the stone seats of the old building in ever increasing rows.

The work was carried out with feverish activity, so that a few days before the scheduled start of the shows, the Curul-aedil could report to the emperor that everything was ready for the opening.

Thus the morning of the first of the festival days had dawned. The whole of Carnuntum was dressed in the festive costume of the arena.

On the huge square that surrounded the arena building, preparations had already been made to roast the hunted animals for the feast of the mob, and at various points the fountains could be seen swirling up white and red wine. Beside it mountains of bread were piled up, and over enormous fires at mighty spits whole oxen were roasted. No animals had yet been felled in the arena, but the mob was not to be kept waiting any longer.

A dense crowd of freemen and slaves had been waving in the square since the gray morning in order to eat and drink their fill, without thinking of the annoying payment, because such landlords, like Caesar Valentinian, were rare and deserved fullest praise.

The wealthier citizens and the patricians of Carnunt, the knights and magistrates, as well as the other people of rank, were no less represented than the poor people, although their pride prevented them from mingling with them. They walked in the feeling of their nobility in the entrances to the arena kept free by legionaries as well as municipal soldiers and considered the feeding of the mob as a kind of prelude to the shows in the arena.

The legionaries were armed in warlike fashion, but without weapons the municipal soldiers stood at the ready, only with stout hazel sticks, in order to maintain order most emphatically with these official scepters.

As the eye was presented with an inextricable picture, so the ear was presented with an indistinguishable tangle of voices that sounded on and on and could well have drowned out the rolling of a thunderstorm. The howling

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of the beasts, which had been left to starve for several days in order to increase their rage, mingled with the wild clamor of the people. The roar that hovered over the square was no longer capable of any increase, it lay like a single giant sound over the arena without fluctuation, without modulation.

This, however, was the main amusement of the noble rabble, to see how the lower rabble fought over food and drink, and thereby reaped more beatings than they would otherwise have received in criminal proceedings. The soldiers of the municipality had an understanding for the need for amusement of their patrons in the ranks of the patricians and knew how to earn many a gold piece by suddenly cutting into the fighting clusters of people with their sticks, until they howled and scattered. The degenerate people did not feel this shame anymore; they only laughed, because they were used to being beaten, and indulged in the most blissful pleasure. After all, they had been granted everything they desired - bread and games.

Mournfully, however, the tall figure of the young hunter - it was Erchantaug - stood apart from the throng and gazed melancholy into the hustle and bustle of the displaced people, most of whom were his fellow tribesmen.

"They are hopelessly lost!" he said, pained. "Lost to themselves and to my work! Already I had hoped to have won them to their deliverance; they, the huge majority in Carnuntum, should be able to destroy, to drive out their oppressors, but - Panem et Circenses! I had hoped to save you Germans in Carnuntum, but you make it impossible! You would poison the other Germans whom I would bring into your walls, and all would remain undone! You, Carnuntum, I wanted to raise to a German Rome, I wanted to teach my Germans to live in palaces Roman style and yet to avoid Roman vices, but it is impossible. Today I declare myself and my Germans free and clear from Roman heritage and the Roman world, and vow annihilation wherever I meet them. Roman blood shall fertilize the German seed, and not one stone of Roman cities shall remain upon another. The ground on which you, Carnuntum, you pandemonium of vices, stand, the ground shall be cursed through all ages to come, no German may take up residence on it! Our hereditary soil shall be cleansed, and I myself will still steer the plow over the field of ruins, of which people will say: that was Carnuntum! But I will surpass you, Caesar Valentinian, in bloody displays, so that your arena game will look like child's play next to mine!

Two bright tears sparkled in his eyes and angrily he clenched his fists. -

The appearance of the square in front of the arena remained the same. A never-ending stream of people surged toward the entrances to the arena, which accommodated the thousands without diminishing the number of people in front of it.

Now the imperial procession was approaching. In front of it a band of

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tuba players and cymbal beaters; but inaudibly the music sank into the unmitigated noise of the people. The tuba players were followed by a cohort of praetorians.

It was a significant courtesy of Caesar to the people that the praetorians appeared weaponless in citizen's dress, carrying as their only distinguishing mark a gilded staff, with the Roman eagle on the pommel.

The people also recognized the flattery applied to them, and tumultuous enthusiasm rewarded the emperor for it. But even this outburst of joy died away inaudibly in the unweakened chaos of voices.

Now the personalities belonging to the emperor's court as well as to the proconsul's retinue moved up in long rows, but all of them in citizen's dress without armor. Finally the proconsul with his immediate entourage, among them also the Aedile Licinius with the insignia of his new consular dignity, the purple stripes on the state toga.

Behind his lictors now drove Valentinian in his state chariot, also in citizen's dress, only adorned with the laurel of Caesar.

The enthusiasm of the people was driven to the highest by this display of civic pomp and deliberate avoidance of all flaunting of arms, but even now the jubilant noise did not increase, since it had already reached the extreme limits of what was possible before.

Soon the imperial podium of the arena was occupied. It was a temple-like building rising above the elliptical rows of seats. On a richly decorated throne sat the laurel-adorned Caesar, under a silk purple canopy, from whose pleats the gold-embroidered imperial eagles gleamed.

The colorful throng of onlookers surged thicker and thicker. The lower rows of the stone seats in the wide oval were occupied by the patrician, knightly and magistrate families, and richly adorned women and girls were to be seen in large numbers. In former times, the fair sex was not allowed to participate in such overpowering popular amusements, but this good custom had long since experienced an incurable shaking; the women no longer allowed themselves to be deprived of the hard-won right of spectatorship, and it was here that they celebrated the most dreadful orgies of unfeminine cruelty. The "wedges", as the elliptical segments of the rows of seats were called, accommodated the lower officials and lesser personalities of the army, while the following wedges were occupied by the legionaries and the people, as far as such enjoyed Roman citizenship. Then came the wedges for the "peregrine" people and the auxiliary troops, and finally, at the very top of the clouds, the standing room was swarming with Carnunt's slave population. Yes, even the slaves had been allowed to attend the arena games in order to offer them a deterrent example, a salutary lesson.

But the deterrent theory was decidedly lacking in practical value and remained completely ineffective. The capricious treatment, the inhumanly cruel hardship, which the slave had to endure, had made him insensitive to any

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sense of honor and justice; he had even forgotten fear, so that he amused himself about his own fate by classifying his fellow slaves according to the instruments with which they were usually chastised, and with cynical derision called the cross the slave's funerary monument.

Therefore, apart from wealth and poverty, no other difference appeared between those present, for rich and poor, master and slave found the same amusement in the bestial spectacle, in all of them equally the animal in man broke the barriers and the question was justified which was the more evil beast, the man in the wedges or the predatory beast below in the arena's sand.-

Now the "Mappa" fluttered from Caesar's hand down into the sand. It was a white cloth with the emperor's name embroidered in gold, surrounded by eagles, whose falling announced the beginning of the spectacle.

For a moment there was silence in the wide circle of the arena; the more than two hundred thousand were silent, and only the desert beasts howled behind their bars. But then such a howling broke out that the building seemed to shake. The human beast shouted over the desert beast. Now it fell silent again, for the gate on the long side to the right of the emperor was opened. Tension of expectation lay over the arena.

Under the blaring of martial music, the gladiators made their entrance in parade step. A strange pomp.

At the head rode the "Munerarius principalis" in rich Greek garb with his staff, the Purple Rudi, in his right hand proudly held to his side like a general's baton. He was followed, also mounted, by twelve Munerarii with crimson rudis. These were the judges, led by their umpire.

After them the gladiators entered the sand. One hundred and fifty men called "Retiarii" made their entry. These were the naked net fighters with the trident. These were followed by one hundred and fifty men, the "Myrmillones". These were the fish fighters with big square shields and short daggers. Then again one hundred and fifty "Thracians" entered the arena. These formed the transition to the heavy weapons; they were partially armed and carried a small round shield together with a short crooked sword.

Only now came the actual gladiators, the sword armored "Hoplomachi" raised in the same strength. A select, splendidly equipped crowd with their mighty humped square shields, the short swords and the flowing helmet crests.

Behind them, a cavalcade of sixty men on fiery steeds entered the arena at a short trot. These, too, were completely naked, and their weapons consisted of mighty Greek, exceptionally long lances, and small round shields. The magnificently bridled horses were saddleless; a panther or tiger skin took the place of the saddle.

It was still quiet all around. Then the Munerarius principalis had reached the place where the mappa lay in the sand.

Without restraining the gait of the steed, he bent lightly and deftly from it

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to the ground, picked up the mappa, and swung himself just as gracefully back into the saddle. Thereupon he artfully parried his horse, waved the mappa at Caesar and called out in a loud voice: "Caesar! The condemned to death greet you!" Then he tied the mappa around his body like a sash.

Then the tubas blared, and a hundred thousand voices filled the air.

But even this welcome cheer lasted only a few moments. There were more important things to do now; the bets had to be placed. The noble world had long since made theirs in the fencing barracks during the daily exercises of the gladiators, but the people had no access there. For them, the "Prolusio" was now held, test fencing with wooden mock weapons. Still silence accompanied this, everyone observed, no one made loud remarks about it, because on his observations everyone based their bets. And everyone bet, from the Caesar to the most miserable of the slaves, for every sum, from fabulous millions to paltry ones.

The crowd became more and more excited as the mock fights progressed, the silence gave way to a buzzing chorus, here and there words of censure or shouts of approval were heard, while the rates of the bets fluctuated, depending on whether the gladiators were more or less trustworthy today, depending on whether one or the other promised more or less prospects of victory.

The excitement grew and grew, the murmur of the people became a shout, a howl; the beast of men wanted to see blood.

The "Prolusio" was extended to the "veris armis dimicare", to the fight with real weapons, to the milder subspecies of the same, "cum Missione", where the fight ended at first blood.

The "pugna pedestris", the foot fight was opened.

Five Hoplomachi faced five Thracians. They were still newcomers to the arena, doing their first tour of arms.

In closed rows they moved against each other in step. Now the acclamation of the audience divided into two camps according to the worlds and performed a howling battle, which kept equal pace with the changing weapon luck of the fighters. "Jo, Hoplomachi!" resounded as the heavy-armed withstood the onslaught of the light-armed. "Jo, Thraki!" rewarded the latter as they charged anew. Thus the battle surged until three Thracians turned to flee. Jeers and howls of rage from those who had lost their bet mingled with the cheers of victory. "Jo, Hoplomachi!" Then this battle of voices turned into an air-shaking jeering, into a furious howling, arena slaves with red-hot iron bars and chain scourges ran towards the timid ones and drove them back into the fight. For a moment there was silence, then it surged again in confusion, "Jo, Hoplomachi! Jo, Thraki!" it became serious. Those who had fled were seized by a kind of fighting fury, - "Jo, Thraki!" - The heavily armed men gathered again - "Jo, Hoplomachi!" - one of them rushed, but the others closed the line - "Jo, Thraki! Jo, Hoplomachi!" And so fear and hope wavered, - for the sake

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of winning the bet. - At last the battle was decided. Five had sword and shield thrown away and wounds shown. Only two of the Thracians who fled at the beginning had wounds, the third had remained unwounded and victorious. He was not cheered by those who had mocked him only a few minutes ago. Those who bet on him collected enormous profits and rewarded him with rich gifts of money to make him bolder for future campaigns.

Many a similar battle was fought; no fighter had yet lost his life. But blood had flowed, the sand was reddened, and this had made the people furious.

"Sine Missione! sine Missione!" roared from the seats. The lowest, as well as the highest rabble wanted to feast on the death rattle. Sine missione, to the death.

Five Retiarii entered the arena. Five Myrmillons met them from the other side. With wild shouting, the naked net fencers ran through the arena. Above their heads, their red nets swirled like flags; the tridents sparkled in their elaborate spinning. Here and there a trident flew whirring in the air, but with a sure grip his slinger caught it again without inhibiting the run. The fish fighters followed them cautiously, for woe to him around whose arms the red net was entangled, he would have been hopelessly lost: the red net would have been far more terrible than the insidiously flashing trident. Thus they waded for a long time seemingly haphazardly, although each kept a sharp eye on his intended opponent. Then a Myrmillon was entangled in the red net, and the trident was already flashing menacingly before his eyes. But the dagger of the fish fighter flashed, cutting the net, a quick turn, and the trident sat firmly in the shield. A second flash of the dagger, and Retiarius lay bleeding in the sand. Equally unfortunate had they all fenced, the net fencers. Groaning, they lay on the ground, pleading for their lives.

The Munerarii had jumped in and had seized the arms of the victors at the ankle, because the people had to pronounce the judgment over life and death, they could exercise mercy.

The beast of men, however, demanded death. The thumbs lowered - among them many a well-groomed domina - and from the seats roared, "Converfus pollex!"

Had the thumbs been up, the cry would have been:

"Pressus pollex!" would have rung out, and then life would have been given to the defeated. Thus it did not come to pass; but neither did it come to pass as the sweet rabble expected.

The bets on the Retiarii were too high; enormous sums were at stake, therefore it roared with unbridled fury from the angry below: "Conversus pollex! Death to the wretches, death, death!" Against this the winners cheered: "Jo, Myrmillons, jo, Myrmillons!"

From their convulsively clenched fists, thumbs stared downward like as many drawn daggers. But then something unheard of happened. Four of the

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Retiarii already lay dying in the sand, but the fifth, driven by invincible mortal fear, resisted the deathblow, sprang to his feet, and with a swiftly seized trident ran down his opponent, who silently collapsed dead. As if enraged, he then attacked a second of the Myrmillons, who, unaware of the attack, soon lay dead beside his dead companion. Now the pale terror seized the other three, and howling and screaming they ran before the naked trident-wielding man. The people had become silent; it seemed as if they had forgotten their bets. Trembling silence lay over the masses, and had it not been for the roar of the animals in the kennels, one would have heard the sand crunching under the stride of Retiarius. But the cries of fear of those fleeing also rang through the room. Like a wild cat the naked frenzied man jumped through the sand, zigzagging here and there, crossing the paths of his three opponents and confusing them completely! There the trident whizzed whirring through the air like a throwing spear; the hit fishnet fighter rolled over and in the corpse the trident trembled. But already with a panther leap Retiarius was after the dispatched trident and had torn it from the body of the prostrate. And a few steps from the fallen he ran down the fourth, who in blind despair ran into the trident as if by himself. He, too, did not move anymore and forgot about getting up forever.

Snorting with flared nostrils and wildly rolling eyes, the naked trident-wielding man now ran at the fifth of the Myrmillons. A sight more terrible than that of the Gorgon! The latter burst into a howl of terror, threw shield and dagger from him, ran through the sand crying for help, the furious one behind him. Now the pursued one gave up the flight, when he arrived before Valentinian's throne. There he threw himself on his knees, wringing his hands. In the wedges it remained silent. Then the furious one approached. A shrill cry it was that the last fishnet fighter performed in his life - then he flew like a ball into the air in front of Valentinian. Retiarius had seized him with his trident and flung him upward. Whirling, he sank down, but again he was hurled upward by the trident, whizzing as in a fierce ball game, and again and again. Then a powerful jerk threw the tattered one artfully in front of the throne of the Lord of the World.

Now cheers of applause never heard before resounded through the arena.

But the victor did not renounce his right to win. He picked up one of the red nets, tied the five fallen men together by their feet and dragged them around the arena. Only in front of Caesar's podium did he leave them and bend his knee to Valentinian.

The emperor threw him a palm branch and paid him twenty thousand sesterces. In triumph he was carried through the arena and his so quickly acquired patrons among the spectators showered him with gold and gifts of honor, as if he had freed Carnuntum from the danger of the Quads for eternity.

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The sand had been leveled and the places in the wedges reoccupied.

Then two of the Greek lancers came bursting into the arena. Sharply they chased past each other and tried to stab each other from their steeds. However, no matter how often they came together in full chase, they knew how to cover each other with the body of their horses and not to give their opponent any nakedness. With the heel at the bow, holding on to the crest with one hand, the body hung on one side of the horse and on the other, only the head, half covered by the animal's neck, peeked out as if over a breastplate. At the same time, the long lance whirled through the air with equal sureness, sometimes from the left, sometimes from the right. The horses, however, executed all swings and gaits with the most admirable precision, as if their rider were sitting right in the saddle. To injure or even kill the opponent's steed would have been the highest clumsiness, even cowardice, and therefore the fight was as artificial as it was difficult.

Thus they flew past each other, darting lightly here and there, suddenly turning, executing deceptive swings, but both fighters were equal, neither could outsmart the other. More and more heatedly, more and more lightning-like they executed the turns, the sand sprayed high up and pattered like hailstones against the walls of the arena. With breathless suspense the people followed this agitated fight; now and then the bets flew, but they kept the balance, because none of the lancers was able to oust the other from the trust of the people. Finally, one of them succeeded in deceiving his opponent by a feigned turn, and the latter noticed the feint too late, for the enemy's lance had already seized him by the neck and penetrated through the rib cage into his body.

Now a storm of applause broke out, when the victor skillfully lifted the twitching opponent from his horse and carried him in full chase around the arena on the lance, in order to roll him with a powerful swing in front of Caesar's podium into the sand.

The people raved with delight; Valentinian also threw a palm branch to this victor.

The most diverse fights now followed in rich variety; many a dead man was dragged out of the arena by the "Libitinenses" with the iron hooks.

The murderousness of the spectators had reached its peak.

It was an unspeakably sad procession that now entered the arena: the condemned slaves and slave girls. They were all naked. Each laboriously dragged a pole longer than a man doused with pitch. Arena slaves strode alongside, continually brandishing the scourges. Now they lined up the unfortunates with their stakes in the arena, so that these formed an ellipse parallel to the wall. Now each had to dig his stake into the ground and raise it up. When this was done, the victims were tied to the stakes, then doused with boiling pitch and powdered sulfur sprinkled on top.

The howls of pain of the thus tortured filled the air, but the mob in the

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wedges kept silent and trembled and shook. Not fear, not human sympathy, not any other emotion of the heart, which would do him honor, produced this agitation of the strong-nerved mob, it was the silence before the storm, the silence before the outbreak of the wildest bestiality.

Now the living torches flared up, ghastly howls of pain shook the air, mingling with the crackling of the flames; stifling smoke filled the arena.

Still the human beast was silent like the panther ready to pounce.

Once again a portcullis was raised after the slaves of the arena had left the area.

The free men condemned to death in the arena entered the ghastly lighted room of horror with a swaying gait. They still wore the same clothes they had worn in the streets of Carnuntum, but they were torn and soiled. Who could still think of his outer appearance in anticipation of such a terrible end of life? - And yet! There walks Edone, pale, without make-up; hardly recognizable are the fear-distorted features in the contradiction of the madness. And yet, her hair is daintily arranged, her silk embroidered clothes are carefully folded, the tears and dirt stains are carefully covered as best they can. Yes, it almost seems as if she still found room in her heart for the thought that she had to take this walk without jewelry. She had remained true to herself even in the face of the death of the arena; she died as the conceited, vain woman she had always been.

Pale horror was reflected in the faces of this wailing crowd; then they suddenly froze. From the other end of the arena the roar of the desert beasts sounded close, terribly close. A single horrifying scream of terror, then a hundred thousand-voiced howls of the human beast. It seemed as if the last barriers separating mankind from the beast had fallen, and the most terrible orgy of the most dehumanized murderous lust began. -

Brightly burning, seething blood vapor darkened the sandy floor of the arena, where the comfortably growling predators of the desert abundantly satisfied their weeks-long greed for food. Now and then a torn human limb lay among blood-soaked rags of former clothing. The living torches had burned out except for a few charcoal fountains and ash remnants. Light smoke rose from the arena, lit by the bloody red of the October sun.

Eight more times the same sun illuminated this bloody spectacle.

The people, however, were calmed and remained so. In front of the arena they reveled day and night in abundance, day and night without stopping the turning spits, steamed and bubbled continuously the cauldrons, and flowed without stop the wine from the fountains. If one of them had fallen down senselessly, mastered by intoxication, he was carried to the side to give him time to awaken to renewed intoxication. Those who could no longer find a place in the arena found a substitute of wine and roast meat at Caesar Valentinian's expense.

The people of Carnuntum were calmed, for they had - bread and circuses, and they remained calm, because they hoped for - bread and circuses for the future.

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Chapter Fourteen

Winter Begins

The circus games were over. As Licinius had predicted, the spooky events had completely ceased; indeed, they seemed to have been forgotten. No one remembered the mysterious cloaked god even with a word, so that the consular Aedile often reminded jokingly how it was he who had made the statement that even the ghostly robe was subject to the whims of fashion.

Licinius assumed for certain that Erchantaug considered himself defeated and had given up trying to stir up anew the people who had turned their backs on him.

Blinded by the favor of the patricians, which celebrated him as its supposed savior, he very soon put to sleep the still gnawing doubts and admonishing worries that at first made him wary of a setback. His recklessness gained the upper hand and with it self-praise, for he soon called himself the savior of the Marcus-aurelian colony when he thought of the cunningly executed plans he had forged with his beloved Doria.

Caesar Valentinian was also satisfied. He again turned all his attention to the Danubian frontier of the Roman Empire, indeed, he carried himself with the proud plan of extending the northern frontier of Rome to the shores of the Baltic and North Seas.

More often than ever, therefore, he convened councils to bring this far-reaching plan closer to realization.

Also today the council was assembled. The legate Equitius had just reported on the success of his exploratory expeditions in the Quadenland, which he described to the emperor in minute detail, indicating the exact points where the stone castles were to be raised, as well as the course of future roads.

The emperor had followed these explanations attentively and was so satisfied with the legate's proposal that he accepted it with warmth and, after lengthy discussions, concluded with the words: "The plan has been carefully

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considered and is irreproachable; carry it out immediately! Begin the construction of the castle on the Maidenberg and the one at the junction of the roads from Vindomina to Stilfrida. Under the protection of these two forts, build the roads starting from the head of Trajan's Bridge. Start immediately, don't miss any time!"

But Equitius replied: "Allow me, exalted Caesar, a word of warning! We are not yet equipped. There are two legions in Carnuntum, one in Vindomina, but they are weakened, at peace, and in some cases even fragmented, scattered over the country in civilian service. The Gentes Marcomanorum are still here, outnumbering the legionaries. In this beginning, however, they of all people could become dangerous if they went over to their tribal brethren. Moreover, the first snow lies over the land, soon the ground will be frozen; and frost is the most invincible enemy of every builder. Postpone, exalted Caesar, the construction of castle and road until next spring; but use the winter for doing new digging, and for reinforcing the border troops! Draw the garrisons from Valeria and Noricum to the Danubius and place them in two reserve lines behind the Limes forts to secure Pannonia and thus Rome just in case. If all this is done by next spring, then carry out quickly with determination what you have previously advised and approved."

These words aroused the displeasure of Valentinian. A gloomy cloud of anger shadowed the emperor's reddening face, his eyes sparkled, and in a hoarse voice he raged, "Legate! You are a soldier but speak like a consul with ifs and buts! - Not a word! - It's been a long time - I remember well - you didn't know the word "impossible"! Go at once to the building - I want it now! - If the ground is frozen, then wood grows above the Danubius enough to thaw it, and if the Quads come over Danubius, then this has water enough to drown them. - But leave Rome's safety to the care of those who are responsible for it! -Go and build! Dixi!"

Equitius, surprised by Valentinian's outburst of anger, but hurt by his hasty judgment, now felt his wrathful veins swelling in his turn. Soon he would have forgotten that he was facing an emperor. He could tame his tongue, but not his eye, which sent a sparkling look of anger at Valentinian. With a quivering voice he spoke: "Still today, O Caesar, there is no "impossible" for me, I will build; but even still it is not impossible, that the Quad besieges you in Rome. I spoke as I ought, now I do as Thou commandest."

For a long time the emperor and the legate looked into each other's eyes.

"Grant me, my exalted Caesar, to speak in counsel," began the Proconsul in a sweet voice, with a squint at Equitius. At the sickening tone of these words Valentinian winced quietly; his quick thinking had told him that Equitius had guessed right, his anger had faded. He would not sacrifice so loyal a counselor as Equitius to a Maximianus. A cold glance grazed the latter, then he said kindly and emphatically to the Legate, "Your advice, my dear

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legate, is good and shall be followed to the letter." Equitius had understood the emperor; he pressed his right hand to his heart and bowed in silence.

Restrained rage made the Proconsul blanch, for chance had again monkeyed with him. He thought the time had come to shake the Legate in the emperor's favor, but he had been mistaken and had exposed himself; this annoyed him enormously.

Valentinian had seen through the Proconsul and the latter knew this very well; both had understood each other. But the emperor spoke calmly: "Speak, my worthy Proconsul! With pleasure I hear your advice, but it shall not change what has been decided before."

"Exalted lord of the world!" he began, feeling the sting in Caesar's words. More learned, but less honest than Equitius, he knew better how to conceal the emotion of bitterness. His words sounded calm and serene as he continued: "I do not want to hinder or shake your conclusion, nor the Legate's unsurpassable advice. I, too, would have so advised. But I look further into the future than the excellent Magister armorum. Consider, my Caesar, how long the stretch of river bank upstream from Carnuntum to Fafiana⁽¹⁾, opposite the Germanic Chremisa⁽²⁾! Consider how long downstream to Bregetinum⁽³⁾ and Acincum⁽⁴⁾! We now know the route upstream, thanks to the not enough praiseworthy researches of the Magister armorum. The route downstream we do not know yet. For a man's strength, and were he himself an Equitius, this task is overwhelming. Equitius has explored the land, sketched the plan for castles and roads. Let, O Caesar, this plan be carried out by others; Equitius has enough to do to explore the country further downstream to Acincum."

Of course, the Proconsul had wanted to say something completely different, but since he saw that he could not get anywhere with Equitius, he at least tried to remove him from Carnuntum. In his mind he had already put his son Marcellianus in Equitius' place, and if the Legate was removed only once, the rest would be convenient.

Valentinian looked the Proconsul sharply in the eye because of this not unwise advice, as if he wanted to find out the secret cause that had prompted this suggestion. He cradled his head suspiciously, delaying his answer longer than usual. Then he said thoughtfully: "Your advice is worth considering, Proconsul. Yes, it is justified. But it is not yet urgent. Winter is coming and buries the land in snow and ice. The best Magister armorum, even if he were an Equitius, would not be able to make a safe entrance where deceptive

(6) Today Mautern on the Danube; i.e. Carnuntum to Mautern up the Danube is about 75 miles.

(7) Now Krems on the Danube.

(8) (Lat. Brigetio), then Szöny, now Komárom, Hungary. Carnuntum to Komárom (down the Danube) is about 80 miles.

(9) Acincum (Aquincum) is a ruins now in Budapest, another 50 miles downstream from Komárom.

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snowdrifts surround him. But I will keep your advice. For the time being, however, let things remain as they are, until Danubius rolls the last ice floe against Pontus Euxinus."

The emperor rose, and the council was ended.

Evening had fallen, shrouding the left-bank floodplains of the Danubius in ghostly twilight. A light, fluffy blanket of snow had toppled the earth as if rehearsing its nice winter dress. Hoarse "Kahrah" sounded from the air. Ravens were flying in dense flocks above the woods; it was the first of many hungry days for them, but also the consolation for future abundant grazing, when the snow is deeper and the forest animals sink into it and die. Now, however, the "Kahrah" sounded sad, like a song of the dead over the country-wide shroud. The trees stood bare and defoliated. Like the tousled hair of wailing women at the funeral fire, the clematis tendrils of the floodplain forest stared disheveled. The wild hops hung sadly from the weather-beaten elms like torn hunter's twine, the glass-brittle stems of the otherwise so supple leaf pillars splintered in the evening wind down into the snow.

On the evening sky, darkening in the dull red, half of the Moon rose with a pale glimmer of its shivering light. Shy single stars had followed him.

Wrapped in his gray coat, his backpack on his back, the disguised Legate stepped to the bank of the Marahabia. There he had sunk a barge in the river with stones, and nearby the rudder was hidden. Soon the artless craft was afloat. It was one of those boats used by hunters and fishermen. A Roman would have considered it beneath his dignity to use a boat other than a keel-rigged one, let alone a Legate. Equitius in his disguise knew well why he held it that way and not otherwise. With a strong push he drifted from the shore into the waves of the Marahabia, which rose from the silver of the moon. Standing, ruling the barge with the grappling hook, he soon entered the mermaid pond. - It looked good. Gone were the blossom slopes, gone the densely leafy shrubbery, the leaf-cloudy cathedrals, All barren and bare. Only numerous spherical mistletoe bushes shone in the pale green through the tangle of shadows of defoliated floodplain forest splendor.

Around, in a bluish-white frame, the mirror of the small Nixie Lake yawned black, flashed through by the moonlight flitting over it. Broken and bent, yellow-brown reeds floated on the eerily gloomy waters, behind which, a few weeks ago, the beautiful fairy Schwanhild had sheltered so teasingly when the water whispered in the cheerful green and Equitius had robbed her of her swan cover.

But the legate couldn't see these changes of the Nixie home, because another star, other than the scenic charm, shone for him.

The barge had entered the narrow crevice and ran crunching on the sand. Equitius jumped ashore and thought to pull the boat higher to shore to secure it from drifting. Then he felt himself embraced by two soft girl's arms, and despite the darkness that hovered around him, he knew who greeted him so

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warmly.

He pulled the girl to him and kissed her heartily in the manner of a soldier. "My lovely swan-girl, two long, anxious weeks I had to do without your kiss!" And again a long embrace united the lovers in intimate embrace.

"Happy welcome, my heart's darling!" said Swanhild, and added: "Come to the warming fire! already I waited for you; come to my dungeon! to which the evil Agez banished me, since the cruel one killed my little blue flowers with ripe-cold frost; come!"

After this welcome, she had seized his hand and pulled him along through gorges and crevices, until the stalactites, illuminated in countless sprays as if by will-o'-the-wisp flames, betrayed the proximity of Swanhilde's chamber.

The room was pleasantly warmed by a mighty fire; a lovely smell of roasting increased the comfort of those who had wandered far. Here the couple greeted each other again, for only now were they able to see each other. Then Equitius threw off his knapsack; but Schwanhild pushed the half-roasted goose back to the fire and turned the spit.

While Equitius was digging out the contents of his sack on a slab of rock that served as a table, the little nixie turned and basted the roast, watching with curiosity the doings of her paramour. With great satisfaction Equitius perceived this. But he pretended not to notice how Swanhild looked with astonished eyes at the fruits that were strange to her. He had set out oranges and dates and other Italian fruit, but also hams and cheeses, bread and several jars of wine.

"And your fatherland is completely free of our ugly snow? I can't believe it, green all year round, and always flowers and fruits! Is it true, then?" So the girl asked, eagerly busy with the roast, which rarely gave her time to cast a fleeting friendly glance at Equitius. He almost wanted to fight for her with the spit, but he realized that such an action would be unwise and refrained from it. However, he stood next to his little nixie and occasionally stole a kiss from her or otherwise teased her with some kind of dalliance.

"No, thank Jupiter, snow knows my merry Tarentum as little as your mermaid home knows laurel and palm trees!" So answered Equitius, and then added dreamily, "When the myrtle blooms, the aloe cradles her candelabra arms in the zephyr, and Lyaeos' sacred vine nods from the olive tree, when the orange blossom fragrances sweetens the evening breeze, O Italia! - How very differently wouldst thou, in my nook, kiss me there, than here in this tomb, made only for bears, but never for the most delicious girl-blossom, which the gods bestow upon me in thee!"

Tenderly he pressed the girl to him, who let it happen willingly, but then said with teasing reproach: "And why have you come to our bear country? Did I call you? Didn't you find an Italian girl who liked to kiss you under the palms and laurels?"

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A sad look met Swanhild's eyes, who was again eagerly turning the spit.

He sighed heavily, then spoke in hushed tones, "That hurts, Swanhild! Who spoke of Italian girls? But I have thought of taking you there with me when I return home, for I do not play a dallying love game with you, the gods' kinswoman; as my spouse you shall become a Roman citizen, shall give life to Roman citizens! And see, just today your mockery hurts twice! So hear what I wanted to conceal. When the snow melts outside, then I must leave here, far away, and if you do not follow me, as I have often asked, then, then I shrink to a shadow, for my soul remains with you!"

Sadly he bowed his head and sighed.

But he was completely confused when, instead of the expected tears, there was a sudden outburst of passionate joy with stormy caresses. His grief and the feeling of bitter disappointment prevented him from surrendering to them. With tears welling up in his eyes, he escaped from Swanhild's embrace, and with difficulty he forced out the words:

"This is mermaid style! I wretch, who thought you otherwise! Is this how you reward loyal love? You are pleased that I part from you? O Tacitus, O Tacitus'. How falsely thou hast told of the Teuton's love!" Sobs choked his voice; he had jumped up and turned away to let his pain run riot.

Schwanhild looked at him with wide eyes; still she had not understood him. But then a mischievous smile flashed across her features; she thought she had fathomed the misunderstanding. So she pulled her hands away from Equitius' face, looked him in the bleary eye with a mischievous smile and said in a half-reproachful tone: "Now hear me, you living river, you who so rudely revile me! That is what makes me so happy, that you must go away, far away, because I can follow you; the further, the better! From Carnuntum the sisters would have taken me, cruelly torn from your side, therefore I must not follow you there. But with distance their power diminishes. From their persecution we may then rejoice in our marriage. Do you now understand my delight? O, what bliss, what happiness, my only beloved!"

And with stormy caresses the girl showered the now only comprehending Equitius. Smiling with tears, he clasped the girl to his heart in a heartfelt embrace. The cave, which a short time before had been called a bear's den, now seemed to him more glorious than the palace of the gods on the sun-gilded heights of Mount Olympus.

In blissful oblivion, the couple held each other for a long time.

But then, with an expression of terror, Schwanhild broke away from the legate's embrace and hurried to the spit with the cry of pain: "My beautiful goose!" It was too late. Dreadful smoke filled the room, it crackled and stewed, and the hearth's sacred flame had consumed the goose instead of the lovers. Black charred bones were only stuck on the glowing spit, that was all. Swanhild was not to be consoled. But when even the wicked, evil Equitius

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showed so little understanding for the misfortune that he could not contain his laughter, Schwanhild felt deeply offended and withdrew sulking into a dark corner of the cave.

Equitius, by the unexpected luck again the old cheerful soldier, took up one of the brought dates and put it into the mouth of the resisting; he did it then with an orange slit likewise. This did good work. Swanhild smiled, and a kiss of reconciliation also made her cheerful again.

The girl now thought to try her luck with another goose, but Equitius objected. Under some cheeky teasing from the girl, the legate rummaged around among the cooking utensils found in the cave until he found a shallow bowl. This soon stood on the three-legged fire bowl above the hearth fire. Curiosity painted itself on the girl's face, reddened by the firelight, at the soldier's mysterious actions. He had taken out strange brown shining fruits from his knapsack and had thrown them with notched cuts into the bowl. They were chestnuts, he had answered Schwanhild's question. She shook her head doubtfully. But Equitius smiled like one who knows what he is doing, and so she let him have his way without question. Now he had chosen a large pot and ran with it to the pond to fetch water. Since he did not ask for the characteristics of the way and also did not take along a lamp, it was to be assumed that this way was no longer unknown to him. Soon he was back.

He also put this pot on the fire. Now he took out honey from his almost inexhaustible backpack and dissolved it in the warming water, pressed the juice of several oranges into it and finally mixed the brew with red wine. In the meantime, the chestnuts had swelled so that the straw-yellow kernel stood out from the notched sections and a pleasant fragrance emanated from the bowl.

Many a teasing word was exchanged, but the girl could no longer restrain her curiosity to taste the unknown fruit. She took out a chestnut and bit it. But the legate thought that she would have done better to peel off the skin earlier. This, too, gave rise to merry banter. Amid cheerful chatter, Equitius had sliced the ham with the bread, handed cheese to his girl as well, to which the chestnuts were eaten. Thus the meal, which they both enjoyed, passed in the happiest mood, without them forgetting about love.

Equitius had planned to return to Carnunt with the dawn. However, twilight lay over the wintry floodplain as he pushed the barge out of the crevice and out into the mermaid pond; shaking his head, he noticed that the sun was in the west.

Chapter Fifteen

Weihnacht

Deep in snow lay Gambin's kingdom.

The soft fluffy blanket was covered with a hard-frozen crunching crust that often covered the ground more than a man's height and bent the giants of the forest low under the heavy load. Mighty icicles hung down from the cemented branches; these were the fetters of the frost giants into which they had chained all living things. Many a branch, many a trunk had succumbed to the shackle load and crashed into the snow.

The game had to endure great hardship. The black boar, the strong-boned stag, also the swift deer, they all broke through the over-harsh snow cover with their hoofs and fell prey to wolf and fox and wildcat, which, scampering across it, effortlessly hunted down the weary lords of the forest; the wild steed or the mighty meadow duck suffered no less, but the raven was of cheerful disposition, for wolf and fox, lynx and wildcat supplied him abundantly with the remains of their table. Humming, the good-natured bear, Mr. Petz followed the scent of bumblebee nests, while cheerfully hamsters and weasels snored away the grim winter in their burrows. The other small quadrupeds had made themselves at home for hibernation in the abandoned nests of migratory birds, and in the holes in the stumps and fallen logs.

It was just winter with all its sufferings, but also all its joys over the country, because the next night was Weihnacht.

The cheerful sound of the bugle and the braying of hounds resounded through the forest. King Gambin had gone to the woods with a stately hunter's retinue to deliver the atonement for the feast, as was his paternal duty.

"Hu Sau, ha Loh!" ⁽¹⁾ resounded the battle cry through the thicket. Snorting and smoking, a mighty-legged boar burst out of the wood, and with wrathful, sparkling eyes he made his way so that the snow in front of him

(1) Old hunting call of the Sauhatz; today: Hussa hallo! Loh = forest.

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sprayed like water in front of a Viking dragon ship. Beside and behind him, tightly knotted, was the quickly attacking dog pack. In the fury of the pursuit, the hounds crowded around the defensive boar to grab it near the tusks, and if one or the other of the pursuers was struck lame or dead, then others jumped over the howling one to seize the boar. Many a good hunting dog lay dead in the snow, but whoever wants to have boars' heads must put dog's heads on them as well, that is the ancient hunter's law. A few horse lengths behind the tangle of animals, Gambin and his hunting companions roared into the clearing on smoking steeds.

Two males had almost simultaneously seized the boar by the tusks. The boar let out a roar of rage, his trunk trembled convulsively, the lights sparkled and he angrily pointed his terrible tusks. But he never managed to move; huffing and puffing, he trampled the ground. With satisfied growls, the two dogs chewed the ears of the captured enemy; with howls and loud attacks, the pack surrounded the forest's rager.

Then the king was quickly out of the saddle and in front of the irritated animal. The boar-spear was raised, with the left fist pressed against the left knee, with the right steering the shaft and supporting it on the right knee, so he awaited the furious animal, which the hounds let loose at a shrill whistle of the king. Foaming with rage, the boar ran at the bold hunter. With a powerful and sure thrust, the hunter caught the boar under the front shoulder blade, so that the catching iron penetrated the bristling body of the animal up to the parry bar. The angry grunt was suffocated by the murmur of pain; blackish blood, interspersed with foam, gushed from the mighty throat, and then the boar collapsed, still and dead.

Cheerful yelps and blaring horns announced to the forest dwellers that man, as the lord of creation, had exercised his right to rule.

But there was something else that was the duty of Gambin the Housefather. Like the sacrifice he had to kill himself, he also had to cut down and steer the Weihnacht tree himself to the hall.

And this was not an easy task. There was a mighty oak forest which surrounded Stilifrida, but custom demanded a holy fir for the Weihnacht tree. For the youngest son of Wuotan, to whose birth Weihnacht was consecrated, was Vali dwelling in the fir, whom far away in the west the frost-giant Rinda had borne one night to Wuotan to avenge Baldur's death.

So Gambin and his hunting companions rode sharply northward from Stilifrida, where a moderately high hill was covered with fir trees.

Soon the king found the appropriate tree. It was a magnificently slender fir with a trunk the girth of a man. Gambin took the axe and cut into the bark of the trunk, without yet calling the three sacred runes of the supreme gods to consecrate the tree.

Now the place was determined, where the falling tree had to land in order

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to have the correct position for the descent down the hill.

Then Gambin stepped in front of the tree and dealt the first blow with the pious saying "Gods' Rule!".

The king's powerful blows echoed muffled through the lonely pine, and with grumbling roars the fir tree sang its death song. More and more the trembling movement of the trunk changed into a swaying one, and now the tree began to lean noticeably. The hunting companions jumped up and supported the fir with their hunting spears, while Gambin cut a small notch into the trunk opposite the large notch he had already started. Then the king spoke one word: "Go!" All of them quickly jumped to the side and pushed the sinking trunk with their spears in that direction, so that it would fall and reach the predetermined place.

Gambin, however, stood next to the fir with his axe ready to cut, waiting for it to fall. Increasingly strong groans and crashes made the trunk tremble, which was sinking more and more with increasing speed. Then - during the fall of the tree - the king once again hewed the three runes of the gods into the standing stump, to each of them saying the pious word of blessing "Gott walt's". The last rune was hewn, the last blessing spoken, and also with the loud crash of breaking branches, the forest giant fell down roaring. The crash and roar echoed through the forest as a farewell to the departing comrade, and then it was quiet again in the icy forest wilderness.

"That was a royal tree felling!" exclaimed the marching lord in a tone of admiration and added: "Honestly, that announces good luck, my king! The fir tree fell like a queen. The moss maidens may thank thee for the mighty protection from the wild hunt. I was well aware; if you, my lord king, had shouted "Rules of Gods" instead of "Gods' Rule", the Moss Maidens would never have found shelter and rest at the tree stump and would never have fallen victim to the wild hunt."

The king smiled merrily, wiped his sweat and drank a good draught of wine from his gourd.

But Suntarolt the Hagestalden was annoyed by Randmar's remark, so he shouted: "Blitz and Blue fire! You should have left that alone, Lord King! What do we bettors of battle care for the whimpering wenches of the haunted forest! Suntarolt has been an enemy of women ever since he wielded a sword, and old Wuotan is right when he cleans the forests of the howling ogres! What do you create, king, a free place for the ugly mossy cads before the king of the gods? Suntarolt would praise thee, if thou wouldst diminish instead of increase it!"

"It would have been a bad arrangement," the king replied with a laugh, "if you had become the king of the gods instead of the old Suntarolt! Then there would be neither wife nor maiden in the world." Then all those standing around laughed, and the king continued in a cheerful hunter's mood. "But it is the custom, and I cultivate it with honor, even though I prefer a light mermaid

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to a barky moss woman. And becoming more serious, he added: "Once, in an hour of unfeeling wrath the kind father of the worlds took an oath to persecute the moss maidens, and now he must keep it, even though he regrets it. But he rewards everyone who creates a new free place for the persecuted. Therefore I never forget it; also I feel sorry for the poor clumsy things. But come on, help your king to lop off the tree!"

Soon Gambin had hewn the top of the fir at the height of two men from the trunk and cut it into a wedge shape at the bottom, while his fellow hunters set about chopping all the branches from the trunk smoothly by the bark. When the trunk lay like a roller, the king cut a spall into the foot of the trunk and stuck the top of the fir tree into it, so that it looked as if a young fir tree was sprouting from the lying trunk. While the king was doing this, his hunting party gathered the cut branches and fixed them to the younger end. Cheers and horn blasts announced that this work was also done. A merry round of drinks concluded the felling of the king's tree. Now it was time to bring the Weihnacht tree down to the valley and then to the royal palace.

In front, just behind the wedged top of the fir tree, Gambin sat astride, behind him his entourage, and now they went down to the valley in good cheer. With the hunting spears they pushed the log until it came into gliding motion like a sledge, at first slowly sluggish, then faster and faster, finally like the unstoppable whizzing of an arrow's flight.

What a ride through the icy pines! Like the dragon ship's helmsman riding the waves, the royal tree feller steered the log boldly and audaciously through the mountain forest down to the valley, sometimes pushing the shaft to this side, sometimes to the other, in order to avoid a giant tree here, a bush there that was too dense; younger undergrowth was run down by the force of the arrow-quick descent. The trunk came crashing down under the loud whooping of its riders, snow spraying up in front, the icicles splintering; crunching and cracking, tattered branches followed behind. Screeching, the winged beasts of prey took to the air, Master Petz the bear trotted grumpily away, and the clever Reineke's glittering eyes peered out from his safe hiding place at the strange ride.

The logs whizzed past them on their daring way, and finally the last leg; they had reached the snow-covered farmland. Now the wood riders had hard work, for the logs had to be forced to descend in a sloping direction in order to reach the place where the castle path to Stilifrida's horse gate, separated from the Amber Road. This was the gate to the north of the palace, through which the envoys of Valentinian had entered.

The log stopped there, because it was the lowest point of the road and went uphill from here.

The hunted prey and the horses were waiting in the snow. A joyful hustle and bustle began. The hunted boars were soon attached to the Weihnacht

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block, the steeds were harnessed in front of it and mounted by their riders. Then the whips cracked, the sound of bugles and cheerful hunting calls resounded, and the Weihnacht tree slowly slid up the open way inside the horse gate to the royal palace.

Loud cheering of the townspeople, like the noise of the returning hunters, announced to Frau Gotelinden the Housewife that her husband had fulfilled his paternal duty and now began hers. Already since the gray morning she had been working in the kitchen with her daughter Gisalhild, the housekeeper (the Schaffnerin), the maids and maidservants. The hearth of the kitchen was the altar consecrated to the father of the house and his wife was its priestess, the guardian of the sacred flame. And so it was held, whether the householder was king or peasant, the housemother the richest mistress or the poorest of the poor. The father of the house was considered as the representative of the highest God in his clan, and the mother of the house was the representative of the woman Frouwa, and this dignity was sublime and holy above all rank and fortune.

Therefore, Frau Gotelind stood at the kitchen door leading into the courtyard, a silver bowl in her hand, waiting for her husband. In the bowl, however, lay the first three doughnuts, which she had baked for the celebration of Weihnacht as the most sacred sacrificial pastry.

The first three pieces, still steaming, were given to the father of the house, and the mother of the house had to hand them over to him at the threshold of her realm, the kitchen. Beyond this boundary of her territory no woman - whether queen or peasant - carried the homage to her husband, for she was a woman and neither a maid nor a slave; any other way would have been contrary to decency and custom.

Gambin then also received the first pieces of the consecration pastry due to him at the kitchen door. He shared the first piece with his wife and daughter, but ate the other two alone. This was not a common custom, but a cozy honor for wife and child and was also felt as such.

But both husband and wife still had many jobs to perform and therefore none needed many words. A strong kiss closed this simple act of homage, then each went to his or her labors. Only the "holy evening" would be celebrated by both, in company with all the housemates, in consecrated peace.

The queen had gone back to the kitchen. When Gambin turned around, the horses had already been led away and the wood had been prepared, for it was up to the father of the house to work on it with his own hands.

With the saw handed to him, the king cut off the part of the tree where its top was spread out and carried it himself into the room. There he placed the tree in the middle of the hall, so that it would serve as a sacred ornament and consecrate the gifts it was destined to carry. Returning to the courtyard, the king cut a second piece from the tree. He carried this into the kitchen and placed it by the hearth without setting it on fire. After the king had cut these

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two most important pieces from the trunk, he left the rest to his retinue. They also cut it up in a hurry and stacked the logs in a special place of honor in the courtyard, because Yule logs were good for many things and not common firewood. Therefore, servants were not allowed to lay hands on the sacred tree and it was also considered an honorable distinction for the noblest of the king's retinue to chop the Yule tree.

The fallen shavings, like the shredded branches, were now piled up in the middle of the courtyard by the Marshal and the Hagestalde and set on fire. Others of the court dignitaries dragged in the killed boars, for again it was up to the king to separate the heads of the sows from their rumps. Suntarolt and Randmar helped with this task.

Suntarolt grasped with sinewy arms the two forelegs of the first boar to force them after the hind legs, while Randmar grasped the sow's head by the trunk to push it into place as needed. Between the two stood the king aiming at the short-stemmed whiskers.

Just behind the ear, the king's axe blow hit the neck of the animal and with a powerful jerk, without pulling out the axe or making another blow, Gambin forced the bit to advance to the nose. It was a master stroke.

"By the spear throwing Wotan!" cried Suntarolt delightedly. "Lord King, with such a blow Donar himself does not equal you! Suntarolt has already helped many sows to lose their heads, but he has never seen such a master's cut! So the old bear-skiner thinks to help the eternal hunter one day, when he detaches the heads from the barky leather of the ugly moss-women!" And the old man laughed full of berserk fury.

But no one had paid attention. The boar was rolled around, the second blow was delivered with the same mastery as the first, and the third completely separated the pig's head from the rump.

The applause of the hunters rewarded the mastery of the royal huntsman.

While Gambin was working on the second boar, Astold, the steward, and Sintold, the treasurer, were holding the first pig's head, which had been cut off, and thrusting a wooden stake through its throat, so that the head hung in the middle of the pole. The two then held it over the fire, turning it continuously as if the stake were a roasting spit, until all the bristles were singed off. Now they rubbed the singed pig's head with fir brushwood, whereupon they rubbed it with bacon and shone it until Strangolf, the blacksmith and freeman, sank the last traces of hair with a glowing iron rod. This turned the skin black-brown and shiny like polished ore.

"By boiling water and fiery ovens, Victory-father! The pig's head shines brighter than over there in Carnuntum the two golden Caesars, Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla! Haiö! Already would Suntarolt like to mash him between these teeth!"

But even now no one was disturbed. Astold pushed the pig's head off the

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pole, cut both of its jaws and handed it over to the kitchen for further treatment, to do the same with the remaining sow's heads. The king, with the help of his hunting companions, proceeded to eviscerate the hunted animals.

But it was not only in the courtyard that there was unusual activity today. At the hearth Frau Gotelind was busy stirring her work-strong hands and Gisalhild as well as the court ladies were not standing idle. To bake doughnuts and honey cakes for a large royal court was no small piece of work, and to do so was the Housewife's own duty. The preparation of the other dishes was left to the chef and the maids. If the queen was already more hurried than ever, then the respectable fat housekeeper was completely out of breath; for it is an old kitchen law that the greater the holiday and the greater the demands on the women in charge, the housekeeper and cook, the higher the excitement behind the cooking pots rises and, like a midsummer thunderstorm, unloads itself on the lowly maidservants.

In the midst of the various smells, in smoke and steam, in the hissing and bubbling of the cauldrons, crackling and stewing of the pans and turning of the spits stood the freedom of the kitchen mistresses of the royal palace, Frau Gotelind, Gisalhild and the Schaffnerin, to be looked upon like the goddesses of vengeance. By the highly reddened maidens, who shot about between the tubs, these terrible three were most fearfully avoided at body-length like deep thunderclouds that smash into everything that comes too close to them.

"What have you done there again, Waga? Are you pouring the blueberries into the fish broth? May Frouwa chastise you, you animal with three wings!", angrily shouted the housekeeper to an unfortunate maid. These words were accompanied by a peculiar clapping and howling of the culprit, which suggested a hasty trial with a preordained guilty verdict. But already other events in the kitchen room had caught the attention of the schaffnerin.

"Let Trampa cut open your bellies, fill them with glass and straw, and sew them up with plowshares and chains instead of needles and twine, you incorrigible trolls! Then she shall set fire to the chaff, so that you burn from the inside out, just as you have let this goose burn for me here, you ugly cross-eyed quarter-breed, you! And you, is this pewter plate completely clean, is it bright?" Without waiting for a reply to the question, the plate slapped the maid a few times on the head, whereupon the strict conductor seized the maid's hand, pressed horsetail into it and now rubbed the plate with it until the blood dripped from the wailing woman's fingers.

The queen, like the gentle Gisalhild, was also transformed in the vicinity of the hearth; they were by no means behind the housekeeper in repartee. The kitchen maids had not yet been able to agree on which of the three was to be given precedence in terms of the power and fullness of the expressions of displeasure they so generously dispensed.

In between, however, there hissed and bubbled, stewed and seethed, in many voices and with many odors through the kingdom of the housewife, in

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which only rarely a man's glance strayed.

Thus, amidst much activity, noon had approached. Otherwise, the midday meal was taken in the great hall, the Remter; but this was not possible today. The holy Weihnacht tree was already there, fresh linen was already spread over the tables, and everything was prepared for the celebration of Weihnacht eve. Since there was no other large room in the castle, and Frau Gotelind also wanted to save her maids the work, the midday meal had to be taken in the kitchen. For the king, the queen and Gisalhild a table was set in the queen's bower. However, the door between the bower and the kitchen remained open so that the queen would not lose sight of the kitchen during the meal.

The king's other table companions, however, stood around in the kitchen or sat on overturned buckets and tubs and were quite happy about this change in the monotonous life at court. There was much more fun to be had with the buxom strumpets, to whom every man puffed up his own importance as if he were the king's closest stable brother.

Only the grumpy Suntarolt was uneasy in the kitchen, as if he were sitting in Hell's kingdom. He squatted morosely in a distant corner of the kitchen and made a grim, evil face, so that all the strumpets were horrified and knew that six steps rather than five were between them and the Hagestalde. Randmar tried in vain to persuade one or the other of the maidens by promises of gifts to provoke the fierce misogynist by talking back to him.

He looked, they thought, like the terrible King Isembart, whose ice-blue beard stared like the icicles of the eaves around his chest. They would rather dare - they added with a shy sideways glance in a subdued voice - yes, they would rather dare to give a kiss to the strict housekeeper than to touch even the tip of his bearskin coat.

The meal, by the way, was a simple one; the preparations for the evening table were to blame for the neglect of the midday meal. Broth meat in the stock formed the start, and then followed fish and dumplings, the dish which old custom required for today; bread and mead were allotted to everyone as usual. But everyone was cheerful and in good spirits, and even the strict housekeeper was not insignificantly softened in spirit. And this was understandable. The schaffnerin must have felt not a little flattered to see all the proud gentlemen of the court gathered in the kitchen today, where they were, so to speak, under her protection, for in the kitchen she carried the Marshal's baton. Therefore, from the hearth, which they had chosen as their high seat, she tried to be as kind as possible to the exquisite guests, in order to make the otherwise so proud king's men friendly towards them.

The court ladies, who were also active in the kitchen, but only at Frau Gotelind's side, knew this weak side of the housekeeper only too well. Teasing as they were, they soon hatched a conspiracy among the kitchen guests in order to give the strict lady a little special pleasure.

Adaluna gave her fiancé Randmar the Marshal a sympathetic look, which

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he returned with a smiling nod, whereupon she said, as if in the deepest seriousness:

"I never understand how there can be people who grow old and die unconcerned, when the benevolent gods grant people the means to remain young and beautiful until the time of the gods' twilight and the sun burns! I shall surely fight off old age!"

Seemingly taken aback, Randmar asked, "Is this a lie? Tell me Suntarolt, you who know so much: Is there such magic? Why don't you use it?"

A chuckle ran through the kitchen, but suddenly it was silenced. The old man had sent a look around the table that frightened the maids and even the strict conductor. Then he was angry: "By the giant's nine-headed great-grandmother! Suntarolt knows this magic, but he never uses it, because it is good for him that the women tremble before him."

Then the men laughed, but the maids did not dare to anger the grim hulk, for his appearance was terrible, as he now mumbled incomprehensible words into his beard.

The housekeeper could not get the question of the marshal out of her mind, and even more so the answer of the Hagestald, and it was her only endeavor to direct the conversation back to the rejuvenation spell. Adaluna had planned such a thing. That is why she and Randmar knew how to thwart all her attempts seemingly without intention. The once aroused curiosity of the already precariously aging housekeeper became her worst torment, because it was well known to her that only today the spell had to be performed if she wanted to rejuvenate herself. If the next midnight hour was missed, then it meant an eternally long year to be patient until the next consecration night! And the light-minded young people passed over this important rune riddle so indifferently, as if there were no people for whom it had value; they themselves could have it nevertheless without any problem, once it became necessary, and then, yes, then the remorse would come; of course too late. But she, the housekeeper, wanted to become young again; Astold the steward, was a handsome man, and to let him work beside such a young thing as Seburga, - no, she did not want to think of that at all; least of all now. But time was pressing. The goddesses might know what preparations such a spell demanded, and perhaps it was not yet too late. .

But the laughing guests did not want to become reasonable. The impatience of the housekeeper had reached the highest level. Ada's plan had long since been whispered to all - with the exception of Suntarolt - and Ada therefore had as many helpers as there were men and maidens in the kitchen. Astold seemed like he was acting quite busy around young Seburga, which today for the first time pressed the sting of jealousy into the heart of the schaffnerin, and now she she knew only envy. With the longing for rejuvenation, long-buried desires were reawakened and any acceptance of approaching old age forgotten.

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The housekeeper's restlessness grew, since the short noon hour would soon be over, and then the complex kitchen work would begin again. Then all would be lost.

With the fear of a desperate woman, she finally made a decision. She was afraid of the deed, but whoever wants to practice magic must have a brave heart in her body.

Forgetting her dignity, she jumped away from the stove, leaving the large boiling kettles with the boar legs to themselves. She had also forgotten the huge spit-roasts, for the rejuvenation spell had seized her whole self like an evil fever. Pleadingly, almost humbly, she crept up to Adaluna. But Adaluna was too distracted, and gave answers to the questions like blueberry to fish broth. Soon she realized that she would not be able to reach her goal with Ada. But the beginning had been made. She, too, felt the same as the young warrior when he swung his sword for the first time; she had overcome her trepidation and was gripped by the courage to fight. Quickly determined, she cut a choice piece of roast and boldly approached the old Hagestald with it. He looked frightened enough, but the pleasant smell of roast must have tickled his nose, for a placid growl seemed to betray that he was not completely untamable. She offered him the roast on a blank pewter plate and fluted as flatteringly as possible: "Taste the leg of pork, you rock of Valhalla! I want to make use of your advice, much-experienced, because the love-struck rabble there is in vain to ask. We, who are old, and have long since ceased to remember love, we.... "

But the Hagestald threw a glance at the trusting one, like this morning the boar may have given the dog pack before intercepting the spear with his tusks, so that the housekeeper lost her courage and failed to speak. Suntarolt reached out and took a good bite of the roast, so that the juice flowed through his beard. Grimly he looked up at the frightened woman and chewing with full cheeks he blurted out: "Blitz and blue fire, be quiet old woman! If Suntarolt is to tell you whether you will or will not muff the boar, let his palate have time to think! You females must always prate of love, whether you be young or as old as Allfather's ravens!" But soon the old man grew gentler. Devoutly he chewed and chewed, his expression softened, his growl became more comfortable, at last the last piece of roast was gone and covetously he squinted over at the roasting spits, while he drew his sap-damp beard through his lips. Then he clicked his tongue and started: "Old woman, by Mime's head! Even an old Roman destroyer can forgive you for being a woman, and just as ugly and old as one of the cursed moss women. Valhalla's chef can't prepare the meal for the Einherjar any better than you have cooked this boar."

Again he blinked at the hearth and with a wistful look at the empty bowl he gave it back to the conductor. The latter would not have been a woman if she had not realized that she was now the victor; but she was too clever to show her aim now or even to let herself be offended by the hurtful words.

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Therefore she spoke as trustingly as possible: "Do you, War-Father's darling, also want to taste the boar soup? I would be honored by your judgment!"

The old man clicked his tongue in amusement and then said less harshly: "He wants that, but give him a bigger piece than before; it would be better for a true decision."

Sighing, the housekeeper obeyed. Her patience had to pass a hard test. Therefore, it was a good thing that chance let some maidens run into her at the hearth, to whom she quickly gave several blows with unbelievable skill, which made her feel considerably relieved in her mind. Soon she brought him a solid portion of boar soup, also sweet red cranberries and a mighty horn full of fiery Roetzer wine, and the king himself had no better on his table.

She almost lost her composure, for the old man grimaced horribly. But such was his expression of very special joy. The persevering one felt abundantly rewarded by Suntarolt's praise: "Blitz and blue fire! That's good, you humanized moss wench! But now be silent; Suntarolt's palate must think undisturbed!" And the old man clicked his tongue and growled like a bear before the bees' nest. The housekeeper heaved a sigh of relief. She had tamed the old ironbeard, but will she still have the necessary time to ask for the rejuvenation spell? What sacrifices had she not already made to this desire today, including the most incomprehensible to herself, for - she remained silent.

Suntarolt, as only an understanding person can do, had conscientiously given himself up to the trial. The bowl was empty, the horn as well. He nodded like one who feels satisfied. Now the housekeeper could not restrain her tongue, but the feminine cunning did not leave her; she directed the inevitable torrent of words according to her intention and wisely used her advantage.

"Valhalla's friend and battle rider," she began coaxingly, "does the pickle seem spicy enough to you, or is more of the spice still needed?"

"By the magic of the sorceresses!" cried the old man; "Suntarolt would kiss thee, if thou wert not a woman, and not one so ugly and garrulous to boot! Nothing add to it, nothing take away, just so and not otherwise is the boar also. But now go and be silent!"

A furtive scornful look of the housekeeper grazed the old man, while she said with flattering confidentiality: "Still more I hold to sample for only your judgment, and none others. Look there! The incomparable stag's pizzle, studded with finger-length slices of bacon, in the most delicious juice of rare roots and herbs and sweet cream, thick as cheese! A masterpiece!" She paused cruelly while he clicked his tongue covetously. Then she continued: "Or are you going to taste from the back of the deer? - Oh how you will, my hero, lick your fingers. But your tongue will also be offered something special! You hardly know them yet, the big golden-yellow fruits from Italia, - I forgot the Waelian name - they are sliced on it and give the roast a good taste. Or would

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you rather taste -"

The old man let his lustful eyes run up and down the rows of pots, then almost gasped, "Don't ask if Suntarolt wants, and don't ask what; prattle less and bring more!"

But the cruel one did not seem to hear, but continued, ". . . from the crest of the Egyptian bull? Three weeks it hung in the smoke of spicy juniper, and has been simmering since noon yesterday. It is as juicy as the berry of Roetz and as soft as the first butter of May. Or, you best of all good . . ."

"No more or, by all the nine heads of the great-grandmother of Dursen!" rumbled the Hagestalde. His patience was exhausted. But cruelly, as only a woman is capable of being, the housekeeper counted down in turn all the glories that tonight and tomorrow's noon would reveal. Suntarolt grew faint. He who knew no wavering in the wildest battle scrum, who always knew exactly which of the opponents he should fell first, which he should preserve for later, the same Suntarolt succumbed to the tickle of the palate, so that almost in soft tones - it sounded as if he were asking - he said to his tormentor:

"By blessed food, by Heidrun and the Sea-cook! Woman, you make this old Roman despisers' brain sore! He eats with his ears and chews with his eyes, but the palate is resting and the teeth turning to rust. Give now of the Egyptian deer's throat, or of the Italian bull's back, or of the deer's bacon neck, or what else, but torment the old man no longer with juicy words, empty horn and bare bowl!"

Like a demanding child, he looked impatiently at the calculating one. The latter now considered her time to have come. The Hagestald was therefore infinitely disappointed when the housekeeper pulled up an upturned tub and confidentially sat down on it just beside him. With undisguised shyness, he moved as deeply as possible into his corner so that not even a corner of his bearskin would touch the schaffnerin. She moved even closer, because she wanted to cultivate secret advice. This came unexpectedly to the old man, so he was not able to speak a word. However, the old woman was not in a mood to let the prisoner get mixed up, so she said in a whisper: "You shall have all that the hearth carries, all that you desire and delight in, and even more; but first answer one question!"

The old man conjured a terrible face, but this time the housekeeper was not afraid anymore; she knew why. She smiled at the old man as promisingly as possible. The old man was overcome with horror; he closed his eyes, then shook himself and spoke hastily: "Thunder and earthquake! Is that your condition, old woman? Ask and do not make many words!" Thereupon he bowed his head like one who submits to the inevitable.

Then the conductor put her hand on his shoulder and approached her mouth to his ear. But as if he wanted to chase away annoying flies, he shooed

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the inquisitive woman away from him, who now considered it advisable to keep a greater distance.

With many words and in a roundabout way, she began to present her heart's desire to the old man. It was not she herself who wanted to become young and beautiful, she did not yet need it of course; but it would be of extraordinary service to one of her mothers, because she was as old as a crow and as ugly as a toad. She wanted to learn this art only out of old love and loyalty to her clan. "Therefore I beg you," she concluded with relief, "do me this favor, never shall it be forgotten!"

During the long speech the old man had become impatient; but he had vowed the fulfillment of the condition. Therefore, he had let the housekeeper speak and now answered: "With spear-crash and ice-crackle, that is too stupid for the old Suntarolt! Do you think, simple woman, as brown as that pig's head there, that it would be as easy as eating bread? There's more to it than yelling at some maids and salting an Egyptian goat! But listen. You shall know!"

He was now ahead of the housekeeper. The Hagestald began:

"It was a strange adventure, which many years ago met this old Roman hater. Let it be told to you as a lesson.

A young warrior came to the army, almost still a boy and none of the older sword-wielders wanted to share a tent with him. Such an untimely young lord stayed away from us, everyone thought. But that didn't bother the boy, who was friendly and of good cheer and otherwise a good companion. By chance, the boy came next to Suntarolt. Suntarolt warned him to stay away, because if he rubbed himself against an old pot, he would turn black. The boy pretended not to hear the warning and began to tell of many wonderful journeys and bloody battles that he had participated in, battles that were fought when our ancestors were still unborn. This seemed to be too much of a Roman lie to Suntarolt, the old battle bettor, so he shouted: "By the wrathful Tyr! You are lying, Milkbeard, more than ten Romans! You must be more than twenty times as old if you have experienced all this!

"I am that and even older," was the boy's answer. Cold horror seized everyone, but the warrior began to tell how he was rejuvenated at the Fountain of Life and what strange journeys he had made to it and still does. For when he feels his old age approaching, he rides west to the end of the world, to the place where Rinda gave birth to the one-night god Vali of Wuotan. But if you, housekeeper seriously desire to go to the Fountain of Life, then notice well that you have to bathe in it and drink from it at the same time. There you will feel the discipleship with every drink. But you must be careful not to drink too much, because it could easily happen that you would become too young and would perish miserably as a helpless little child. Also, remember that the spell is performed only at the same hour in which Vali is born."

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The housekeeper listened attentively and did not lose any of the words. Now she felt only one desire to know where the Fountain of Life gushed and how to get there. Therefore she asked hastily:

"And where is the road and how far is the way? Few hours are left to count until the holy magic hour. Tell me!"

"By Gierlich and Gehrlich, be silent, I will tell you, you impatient one!" grumbled the Hagestald and continued: "The miracle man had endured plenty of dangers and fights. Dragons and gryphons, giants and ogres, he had to endure on the journey of many months. Cursed maidens, magical dwarfs, mountain-moving giants blocked his way or led him astray. All this had to be defeated or outwitted. It was harder than boiling a boar, Schaffnerin! So he had finally reached the end of the world. There it was beautiful. But as you silly women tell it in the parlors, you certainly don't hit it true. The world there is not nailed up with boards, as one thinks who has never been there. Nor can one see through the cracks in the boards how the black elves brew weather and the light elves forge lightning, or how they make new moonlight from old sunbeams and process used moonlight into starlight, shooting stars or northern lights. Or how they mend the rainbow and reuse the cuttings for twilight. This is all brainless female talk, only useful so that you, while you are chattering about it, don't sharpen your loose beaks on us men, which unfortunately happens all too often anyway. The miracle man found the matter quite different. There the blue sky looks firm like a wall on the ground and arches over it like a large oven. There he also saw the moon rising and felt like attacking it. But there he arrived beautifully. A hiss, and skin and flesh and bone were burned away. But in the well of life it healed itself again. And what else did he experience! You see for yourself, this is nothing for you. Stay behind the stove, it would be a pity for you. It's already too late. Soon the sun will set and by midnight you will hardly be in Stronegg and even less at the Rhine; but the end of the world is so far that the way from here to the Rhine hardly counts for one step. But now bring the promised Egyptian pork neck and also some wine! Suntarolt's throat is dry as his shield-leather; he did your will, now do his, you brown wench!"

The conductor was devastated. Even if she had thought for a moment of daring the journey next year, she was afraid of the ghostly haunting. And if she forgot herself and drank too young, if she became as young as a cradle child or even younger It was cold to her heart. But a new ray of hope beckoned: the spell Ada meant must be another. She quickly pushed some roast and a horn full of Roetzer wine to the impatient Hagestald to free herself from him, and pondered how she could find out from Ada what she so ardently desired.

Then the king entered the kitchen with the queen and Gisalhild. The precious time had passed. But the housekeeper had to give vent to her pressed heart, which, judging by the cries of the maids, seemed to be done to the

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fullest extent.

The king had fulfilled his paternal duties and was looking forward to the coming holy evening of consecration. However, deprived of the usual rest in the high seat of his hall, he felt uneasy in the wide castle, in which the women were shifting quite restlessly. Therefore, he preferred to invite his men to a merry ride. Both men and women felt at ease again only after ten horse lengths lay between the riders and the castle.

Now the kitchen bustle began anew. The show dishes were placed on the silver and pewter plates. The gingerbread and the Gugelhupf (bundt cake), the Krapfen (filled doughnuts), the pretzels, and finally the great ornament of the table, the enormous Prügelkrapfen (beaten doughnut, or chimney cake).⁽²⁾

This was a masterpiece of the housekeeper. But it did not get its name from the fact that she was particularly kind to her subordinates when preparing it, as might be mistakenly assumed. That would be a bad mistake, because the Schaffnerin never beat. Rather, the name comes from the beating over which the doughnut is formed. The bigger, the more jagged the doughnuts, the greater the glory for the kitchen. That is why the conductor was proud to show the confidence of Frau Gotelind who allowed her to prepare the crown of the feast.

And so powerfully did the pride of the kitchen's mighty lady affect her agitated mind that she even forgot for a short period of time about the rejuvenation spell because of the praise generally given to her about the successful masterpiece.

But the doughnut was also after that. Two maids carried the monster in and placed it on a mighty platter. It had the girth of a strong man and almost the height of one. In the armor of its brownish spines it stared threateningly, so that one might think it belonged to the hedgehog family. Pretzels, gingerbread, apples and nuts were piled up around its foot, while a multicolored giant bouquet of artificial flowers was stuck into its tube-like mouth.

Thus the ornamental piece of the king's table was carefully carried like a shrine to the king's hall and placed there on the table in front of the high seat.

All breathed a sigh of relief when the installation of the mighty one had proceeded without accident.

With it also silence had entered in the kitchen. The queen, Gisalhild and

(2) The Prügelkrapfen has been preserved among the Lower Austrian farmers, i.e. the direct descendants of the Quadi and Marcomanni, and forms the adornment of the table at all feasts and is the pride of the farmer's wife. Modern confectioners brought it back to the tables of the city dwellers craving variety, but the time-honoured name was not elegant enough for them; "Baumkuchen" is the new name, which sounds nicer to people.

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the court ladies went to decorate themselves for the feast. Then the housekeeper took heart and approached Adaluna imploringly.

"Later, later, dear Schaffnerin, now I must hasten," said the latter, adding with a kind promising smile, "But don't forget to remind me!" Sadly, the housekeeper looked after the malicious one. Then she sat down on an overturned skid, and thick tears rolled down her brown, greasy cheeks.

King Gambin had come home. In the castle courtyard the men stood chatting together, waiting for the call that would summon them to the hall.

Then the door of the women's chamber opened quietly, and Adaluna cautiously poked her head out. As she expected, Randmar stood leaning against the doorjamb as he had earlier. This time he noticed Ada's nearness without admonition.

"Randmar," the girl murmured to him, "what you have spun, you must now unspin! What shall I say to the old fool? I can't get rid of her."

Randmar smiled, shrugged his shoulders and replied, "How do I know? I am not rune-powerful after all!"

Defiantly the girl glared at him and said, "Go, you wicked rogue! Call me Kadolz, he is more willing to help than you! Go, why do you still hesitate?"

This annoyed the Marshal not a little. There was nothing more unpleasant for him than to hear Ada mention the name of the castle guard, but he didn't want it to be noticed. He bit his lips, crossed his arms, looked grim, leaned against the doorpost again, crossed one leg over the other, but didn't say a word. Ada smiled and spoke snappishly, "so go fetch Kadolz, let him advise me, help me."

"What need Kadolz' help, where there is no help needed? Perhaps everything is already taken care of!" replied the Marshal in an excited tone.

A joyful smile played around Ada's face. She confidentially put her hand on the Marshal's shoulder, and looking deeply into his eyes, she hastily said: "Really, you would have taken care of everything, you, who are not a rune-reader? Of course I don't need the help of the gatekeeper; leave him uncalled! But tell me what to advise the old fool!"

But the marshal thought himself too deeply offended to be reconciled immediately, even if Ada had been even more tender with him. He cast a reproachful glance at the girl and said sadly, without heeding Ada's caresses: "It seems to me that old Suntarolt is not so unwise. Are you all, like Freya's cats, mischievous! If one shows you a toy, then your fur becomes smooth again! How you hurt me!"

But Ada knew how to reconcile her Randmar, who did not resist too stubbornly. Soon they were standing in secret chatter at the door of the women's room. The housekeeper hardly suspected that this secret whisper was meant for her.

Dusk was beginning to fall.

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Then Gambin entered the kitchen, where the queen was already waiting for him with Gisalhild and the maidens festively decorated.

Frau Gotelinde now put the Weihnacht log, which still stood where Gambin had put it in the morning, into the hearth fire with a pious saying and waited until one end of it had burned. Then she picked it up again and put it where it had stood before.

At first it burned like a torch, but gradually it burned out and remained standing as a half-burned log. Thus it was to remain at the hearth until the coming Christmas, to ward off unholy spooks and evil weather. Now Mrs. Gotelind lit the Weihnacht candle at the hearth fire and, murmuring a blessing, handed it over to her husband.

He now, carrying the burning candle, went ahead of everyone into the chamber. Wife and daughter, men and maidens followed him there. -

The great hall was festively decorated.

The hanging lamps made of deer antlers were studded with as many candles as the antlers had ends, bright flames flickered in the pitch pans, and in the fireplace a mighty fire blazed. A sweet smell permeated the hall, for the pitch pans had been sprinkled with the small resin grains that the industrious ant collects in its burrow.

The Weihnachtsbaum, however, was not yet lit, but there were as many wax candles in its branches as there were men and maidens sitting at the king's table today, for each of those present had to have his light.

The king lit all the candles on the holy tree one after the other with the Christmas candle and called each one by the name of the person to whom it was dedicated.

The little lights flickered merrily on the ribbon-decorated holy consecration tree, as king and queen sat down on the high seat in a high spirited festive mood. Only Gisalhild was sad, a tear shone in her faithful eye, as she remembered Austrorand.

Now the servants, led by the grand servant, strode into the hall, and then the maids, led by the housekeeper.

But all remained silent, even the royal couple was silent, only Gisalhild wept softly to herself.

One expected the three Norns, who appeared annually on Weihnacht as guests in the king's hall.

In their honor, three yellow candles stood on the sacred tree.

Then the three appeared at the entrance of the hall. King and Queen with Gisalhild went to meet them, each carrying a silver cup of mead and a silver bowl. On each bowl were three apples, three nuts, three doughnuts and three pieces of each of the other pastries. The Norns took this in silence and advanced with it to the table, at which they stopped opposite the high seat. There they placed what was offered on the table, without any food, and began to sing the consecration songs, as was their duty.

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They sang how far away in the west, Rinda had given birth to Wuotan's son Vali that night, how he did not wash his hand, nor comb his head, until he had consecrated Balder's killer to the fire.

Then they sang of the blissful castle that the gods gave to Vali:

*"Where silver is the rock in the silver sea,
Where silver are the trees and silver the bushes,
Where silver the meadow and silver the pasture,
Where silver Vali's castle in silver clouds,
Where silver the gate and silver the doors,
Where silver the hall, and silver the seats,
Where silver the table and silver the roof,
Where silver the throne and silver the harps,
Where silver the posts and silver the pillars,
Where silver the threshold and silver the walls,
Where silver the floorboards and silver the ceiling,
Where silver the signs and silver the shields,
Where silver in the ice goblet the Lirnmeth sparkles
And silver light shines from silver lamps."*

And further the healers sang of the rejuvenated world after the twilight of the gods, of the world-spring which will come after the world-winter, as after the earthly winter again the green-budded spring of the earth returns:

*"Then the earth rises for another time
In eternal green from the bottom of the sea,
The tide disappears under the soaring eagle,
Who calmly hunts for fish from the rocks;
Then the turning dragon is slain,
The adder is down from the envious mountain,
Who with flying wings covered the corpses,
The evil envious worm, now he lies inclined.
Then in the shining glow the Gods find themselves,
To judge the gigantic world-changer,
Ancient runes of the supreme orator,
And some mighty admonition remember.
Then they will find again the Wondrous,
The Golden discs in the grass.
Playing with golden pins and balls,
With which in primitive times
Did Wuotan and all his Aesir race."*

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Then they sang of the eternal castles of the reborn atoned gods, of the places of penance and punishment, and closed the dedicatory song with the following stanzas:

*"But more radiant I see him standing than the sun
There above on a sky covered with gold,
The hall where the wretched dwell as blessed ones
And reap delights for eternity;
For a rich man comes to the circle of the counselors,
A strong one from above ends the quarrel,
With arbitrating conclusions he puts all things in order,
What he gives shall last forever."*

The Weihnacht song was finished. The three virgins took their seats at the table opposite the high seat and drank the mead. Then Wolchangard the Hechsa prepared to make the first apple cut.

Then a confused quarrel of words, the clattering of armor and the rattling of weapons sounded from outside, so that the women were startled and the men loosened their swords in their scabbards. The cause of the noise was not yet known. Gisalhild had snuggled up to her mother as if she feared to be torn from her side again.

Now a huge figure of a warrior became visible in the doorway. Armed, as if he was going to the forest and never to be a guest at a merry Christmas party, towering over all those present by more than the length of his head, he appeared to everyone as a being from another world.

The Norns had sunk to their knees before him, the others were still paralyzed by amazement at the unexpected appearance.

Only Gisalhild had wriggled out of her mother's arms with a loud cry of joy and with the exclamation: "My Austrorand! They held each other for a long time. Still no one had stirred in the wide hall.

Then the three councillors stood up, and solemnly the farewell chorus resounded anew in a significant triad:

*"For a rich man comes to the circle of the councilors,
A strong man from above ends the quarrel,
With arbitrating conclusions he puts everything in order,
What he gives shall last forever!"*

The repetition of these final words gripped everyone to the core; their relationship was clear.

But this had passed the two happy ones without a trace.

"Austrorand, Austrorand, what delight, what unexpected happiness!"

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exulted Gisalhild, smiling through her tears. "Speak, my darling, is the spell already broken, the castle already disenchanted from the earth?" At this, she lifted the helmet from his head and took the shield from him.

His gaze, which rested on her, spoke of joy and melancholy, and with a sigh he said, "No, my good Gisa, my castle rooster still crows nine roosts deep! Only a few hours are granted us, then I must part again. Let us be happy, but ask not whence, whither, not how, not when! Forget the past, forget the future, do not disturb the short happiness of the present! And again they held each other tightly, forgetting everything around.

But already the royal couple had approached the new guest to welcome him. The king had attached a new wax candle to Vali's sacred tree and consecrated it to Austrorand. Then he extended his hand to the guest and said in an animated voice: "Greeting and handshake to you, Wuotan's envoy and future oath! Hail to thee and to the hour of thy coming!"

Frau Gotelind also reached out to him, but unnameable pain brought tears to her eyes; unable to say a word, she sank into the king's arms. He led her back to the high seat with a gentle word of comfort. Austrorand and Gisalhild followed them there.

Now the king and queen distributed the gifts, and as soon as this was done, servants and maids filled the hall.

Only one gift was left hanging on the consecration tree. It was a stately festive robe of soft silk fabric with precious ermine trim, worthy to adorn a king.

Gisalhild had made it for her betrothed; many a tear, many a sigh had been sewn into the garment along with the beads. With an anxious smile she fetched it from the consecrated fir, handed it to her fiancé and spoke with a happy smile: "Never, my Austrorand, did I hope to hand it to you today, when I hung it on the tree! But I knew that you were close to me, and this gave me comfort and strength. Invisibly, I hoped, you would hover around me in this night of consecration, and I was happy in this consciousness; how happy I am now that my bodily eye has seen you!"

With a friendly look Austrorand took the robe from Gisa's hands. Thereupon he hung his shield and helmet on Vali's fir tree, his sword together with the rich hangings, and finally also the shimmering gold armor, which he quickly pulled off his body. Soon he threw on the robe that his bride had handed him, and put the ermine cap on his light curls. Now he wrapped his arm around Gisalhild and led her in front of the tree; there he spoke: "This garment consecrates Erchantaug's son Austrorand to his bride! Know, the brides of the sons of the sun are Valkyries, like Freya and Nana, like Schwaba and Jördis! You are chosen as a queen, as a bride of a battle king by the Champions of fate. Your husband is not granted rest in life, hardly ever in the shelter of the Hutberg; battle runes have been sung to him and therefore also

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no joy runes to you. Therefore, be a battle-bold adornment your gift and not feminine trinkets! Consider, you bride of a battle-hardened King and one day mother of battle-hardened Kings, that before in the blossom grove Freya's honorable oaths bind us, your betrothed will still let the flame of wounds shine in many a wood, and you, my bride, will show yourself sword-wielding as the bride of a god, renouncing tears as well as female trepidation!"

Glowing eyes Gisalhild listened to his words and embraced him with joyful pride. Hanging on his neck, cradling her head on his breast, she whispered blushing: "How ashamed I feel now, my Austrorand; I hardly know how to say it, and yet it presses me to confess it to you like a guilt. How often have anxious doubts extorted tears from me, my darling, when I thought how sons of the sun were born to short life and their brides destined to short lust and long sorrow, when I thought that none had seen his sons, that all were after-born, when - O these were wicked, wicked thoughts, my Austrorand!"

And looking up at him shyly, she added hesitantly, "Surely you must know that, and yet, yet you think me worthy of the noblest of men's ornaments?"

Then he lifted her up to him with a mild smile, kissed her merrily, and exclaimed almost boisterously, "Whether I think thee worthy of the armor? I know you as the future itself! You will wield the sword as the best warrior cannot do better. But tell me, you who know the runes, has Gerda become a widow? Does Frouwa wear the veil of a widow, and was not Wuotan once young? And Donar lives and will live until the worm of the world strangles him; Sibia (Sif) has no need of the mourning robe for a long time yet!" Then, becoming more serious, he continued with a touch of melancholy: "But forget that you are a woman, remember that you are a queen, a goddess! Bear proudly your royal sorrow, your divine happiness, be fully what you are chosen to be, a queen, a goddess! The forces of fate that cast your lot also gave you the strength to bear your destiny!"

As if awakening from a heavy dream, Gisalhild stood beside her betrothed.

If the sight of the man's ornament consecrated to her had been followed by a brief flash of pride and dignity in Gisalhild's soul, yet again the girl's soft sensibilities prevailed, and like a helpless child she had clung to the strong man. But his word thrilled her, now she had matured from girl to queen; now she knew that she was destined to be a goddess.

Silently, Austrorand had watched this transformation, which he purposefully guided. Bright joy flashed from his eye as he pressed Gisalhild to his heart in a new jubilant embrace.

The feast resumed its course.

The questions to the Fates were begun with the cutting of the apple and continued with the nuts, until the largest of the boar's heads was brought in. This was the atonement boar.

Then the king stood up, put his right hand with the bent sword on the

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pig's head and made the vow: "On the boar's head of atonement I, the German king, swear to protect Germany's border, to tolerate no Roman brick in the country and to help cleanse the Rhine of the Romans. So be it Wuotan, so Freyr and so Donar!"

The head of atonement made the tour and each festive member then made his Weihnacht vow.

Then Gambin cut off the snouts of the pig's heads, which, along with the sacrificial cookies, formed the second sacred food of the Weihnacht Eve. Everybody who was staying under the roof of a father's house today had to enjoy the pig's nose, according to the old custom.

This was the end of the consecration ceremony. The Norns left the hall, accompanied by twelve knights under Randmar's leadership. Twelve servants presented the king's and queen's consecration gifts, as well as the meal. This was the abundant portion of food and drink from the king's table, which, when not consumed, was sent with them to their home. At Lake Harug, the servants put down the gifts, Randmar said goodbye to the healers; then, without looking back, the king's men resumed their trek to the castle. They did this hurriedly, because to stay in the holy free place in the consecration night, where all hostages are loose, this created fear even for the most intrepid.

So they went through the city. In front of a small homestead, the marching lord ordered the procession to stop. It was the modest home of Master Tocho, a linen weaver and tailor.

Randmar entered.

The hut offered only a one room interior, which united hall and kitchen, bedroom and servants' quarters. Here, too, a modest Weihnacht tree was shining and Master Tocho was sitting with his wife and child in front of the consecration cake. He was pleased to see the distinguished guest, but he must have expected him already, because at Vali's little pine tree burned one light more than the hut counted inhabitants. A seat of honor at the side of the father of the house was also kept in readiness. The marshal called out, as custom demanded, and then he presented his trade. The master smiled mischievously and showed the marshal a spacious cauldron. The latter was satisfied with it, rewarded the master for the excellent errand with a full-weight gold ring and had the kettle carried to the castle by the servants on poles. The master, who was richly rewarded, escorted the marshal to the outer fence of his dwelling with many declarations of fealty.

In the castle Ada had found opportunity to pass through the kitchen as if by chance. It was already deep in the night; the housekeeper's excitement had reached the highest level. Who was happier than she when she saw the young lady. Soon she was rejuvenated and of good cheer, for Ada had given her secret advice.

How simple was this magic! Midnight was near, and the housekeeper began the rejuvenation spell.

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She stripped down to her shirt. Then she put "nine kinds of wood" on the small hearth flame, which had to burn continuously from one summer solstice to the other. When the fire blazed up, she quickly threw off her shirt, took the pieces of magic she had prepared and hurried into the courtyard completely undressed. To ward off evil fiends, she needed the cat, a piece of crusted bread and a whetstone, as well as chalk and charcoal; this was the old rule of magic. With a beating heart, the thus equipped shepherdess strode out into the courtyard, to the same place where the sows had been cut to pieces this morning. Trembling with fear and frost, spasmodically holding the struggling tomcat in her left hand, along with the whetstone and bread, she quickly drew the magic circle around herself with her right hand, using charcoal and chalk. Gritting her teeth, she spoke the incantation formula.

Now it started. The conductor made a scream and buried her eyes in the fur of the cat. The cat did not know what was happening to him, nor did he understand the purpose, for he bit and scratched his tormentor without her seeming to notice the least. But it was also a ghastly haunting that now began. Three horned figures, shaggy, with long tails, brought a steaming cauldron along, which they placed in the middle of the circle, which the housekeeper drew with chalk and coal. The howling of the fiends was terrible. But then one of them shouted with a terrible voice into the ears of the chattering teeth: "You have deceived us, you ugly kitchen dragon, in vain from the end of the world to you fooled! If you had not the sharpening whetstone, the bread and the biting cat with you, in the bath we would drown you!" Then they disappeared, the conductor did not know how. But it was much easier for her to be brave, since she knew that she was rid of the sinister companions. Now she climbed into the steaming cauldron, safely holding the three magic things. This did the half-starved one good. She felt quite comfortable in the warm magic brew and immediately felt that she was getting younger. With a regretful smile, she thought of the fools who went to the ends of the earth with so many dangers to obtain what such an easy spell brought to her door. Anxiously she was careful not to sit too long in the cauldron, and therefore waited with great attention for the moment when she would have to become smaller. Then it would be enough, for she did not want to become a child after all. What would the chef Astold have done with a little girl? It was not yet because, the size of her body, which was not insignificant, did not seem to be decreasing rapidly, and it had to with the rejuvenation. When she was still young by nature - the Schaffnerin could remember this exactly, because so long a time had not yet passed since then - she had been much slimmer, and so it had to come again. So busy with various thoughts, she had completely forgotten to dip her head into the magic brew. Suddenly she remembered. Three times she dipped her head so thoroughly under the steaming mirror of the liquid that none of her shaggy hair remained dry. With a piteous howl of fear, the cat defended himself against this new adversity, he bit and scratched, but the conductor

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knew only too well that she could not let him go. After all, he was her magic protection against the fiends, who otherwise would have drowned her in the bath, or at least twisted her neck.

At last she thought she was sufficiently rejuvenated. Quickly she jumped out of the cauldron and ran as fast as she could back to the kitchen to dry and warm herself by the fire of nine kinds of wood. Only then did the housekeeper breathe a sigh of relief when she knew that she was safe from any spooks in the magical protection of the sacred fire. She let go of the cat, which immediately expressed a lively desire to escape from the presence of the housekeeper. He did this so hastily that he knocked over several pots on his escape and also caused some confusion under the stove. The housekeeper was too happy about the danger that had happily passed to bear any grudge against the fugitive.

How the warmth of the stove did her good! Drying with a cloth had been forbidden to her by the magic advisor; the fire of nine kinds of wood had to do this, Ada had ordered. Now the young woman wanted to put bread and whetstone on the stove. But horrified, she dropped both as she turned her eye to them, for the magic things had turned black, black as coal. But also her hand had become black, her arm, her whole body, as far as she could see it now; she had turned completely black, as black as the atonement boar which she had masterfully prepared. Then abrupt fright seized her. She ran to the nearest bucket of water to look at herself in its mirror, but oh horror, a Moorish woman cut out of it the most miserable grimace against her and danced in the moving water as if to the grim mockery of the unfortunate housekeeper.

At first she clenched her fists against her reflection in the mirror: a proof that she was not exactly delighted with the charm of her rejuvenated self. Soon, however, it occurred to her that water had a cleansing power, so she put her clenched fists into the bucket and began to wash herself most eagerly. But the color held fast, she could rub and rinse as much as she wanted, it was and remained as black as the Moor King, who had recently been told about at the Stubeten.

Then her eyes fell on her hair, and that gave her some comfort. Her hair, which before had been alarmingly interspersed with threads of white, now also shone with an impeccable blackness; so it was true that she had grown young after all. But the fact that the old housekeeper had become a young Moor caused the good woman an anxious time. Nothing was able to restrain her lamentation; dissolved in pain and grief, she abandoned the futile attempt to wash herself white and cowered in a corner of the kitchen, deep in thought and bathed in tears. She had completely forgotten to dress. But she had become young after all, and Astold

Admittedly, she had an inkling that the kitchen master himself would hardly prefer the youngest Moor to the light Seburga. Wild horror distorted

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her face to the ugliest grimace because of this unimagined thought. With irrepressible fury she began to rage. Raging and screaming, she jumped around in the kitchen, knocking over the buckets, tumbling over steps, bringing down other utensils, which rolled behind the frenzied woman, rumbling and making noise, as if the entire household had gone mad in one fell swoop.

Lured by the noise, the kitchen girls curiously poked their heads in the door, but immediately withdrew them in horror and threw the door into the lock. With a loud howl of terror, they ran away to seek shelter from the terrible spectre they had seen in the kitchen.

In the hall, the party had run its course. Austrorand had left without saying goodbye. None of the guards could tell where he had gone or from where he had come. He had not passed through any of the city gates coming or going, no gatekeeper had seen him. Gisalhild suspected that he wanted to spare her the pain of separation, but this thought was painful even to her. "Bear proudly your royal sorrow, your divine happiness!" This word of her fiancé she wanted to express in a strong sighless farewell to her beloved husband. It seemed to her as if he took her for the timid girl of the past. Tears were about to well up, but then her eyes fell on the mighty shield that was now to arm her, and remembering the words: "The fates that threw you this destiny also gave you the strength to bear it," she conquered her grief and smiled at her weakness.

The hour of midnight had come; from the Hexen tower the heart-rending cymbal resounded into the chamber. The King rose, followed by Randmar, and left the hall. Outside he took an incense pan prepared for him by the Marshal, and a piece of chalk; for the consecration night is one of the four nights of smoke, in which it is the duty of the father of the house to protect his property from evil fiends by purifying smoke.

Thus the two passed through the castle. In the pan burned juniper wood and strong incense. On all the doors Gambin wrote the three most sacred runes of the supreme Three Gods. On the bedsteads he drew the especially powerful Drude's foot, as a counter-spell against evil enemies' imprecations. In the horse and cattle stables he scattered crumbs of each sacrificial pastry in the cribs and also sowed such between the fruit trees of the garden. Then he woke the trees from their winter sleep by shaking them and saying the ancient words:

*"Tree, wake up and grow!
It is the holy day."*

So the king visited in turn everything that belonged to the castle, the apiary, as well as the poultry house, and finally came to the kitchen.

He could already hear the noise from outside, but when he pushed open the door, he thought he saw nothing but an evil fiend. An ugly-looking naked monster, black as night, with tangled hair, was rumbling around between overturned buckets, stumbling over broken broomsticks, rolling on the floor,

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and then jumping up again to blindly and furiously run over other objects.

But undaunted, the lord of men strode up to the supposed ghost, seized it by the armpit, and, shaking it violently, cried out, "What have you, evil smoke, to do in King Gambin's court and house? Escape, or I will banish thee to a place of torment, where thou may repent of having fled too late!"

But it turned out differently than Gambin had thought. At the beginning, however, the ugly smoke stared at him with a look of horror. This he expected, because evil ogres are afraid of spells. But when the fiend suddenly rushed madly toward a sheet, hastily wrapped himself in it, and then fell to his knees before him with a heart-rending wail and begged for mercy, he saw that it might not be a ghost. But when he recognized from the confused talk that it was his own housekeeper, whom he saw transformed before him, then he was very concerned, because he lacked advice to deal with it.

Then Randmar pulled the king aside and whispered in his ear that the magic bath was only a prank and an excellent dye, which master Tocho the tailor with the linen water knew how to prepare very well. He also told the king the reason and the course of events, how the transformation of the housekeeper was carried out.

The king, however, laughed out loud, then turned to the inconsolable woman and said: "Unwise, it seems to me, you who performed the magic. If you had taken the white cat instead of the black one, you would have succeeded, for yours would have been determined by the color of the cat. Remember: the magic never deceives, only your own imprudence mimics the sacrilegious!"

The king, in a very cheerful mood, left the kitchen. But when the strumpets learned that no troll haunting frightened them, they soon filled the kitchen to gloat over the punishment of the wicked housekeeper. But angry glares flashed at the maids, and none of them would have dared to openly mock the dreadful woman, no matter how much they felt inclined to do so.

Therefore, it still remained quiet in the kitchen. But when the queen with Gisalhild and her maidens, as well as the king's men, came to see the Moor, things came to life, for teasing words and taunts now rained down on the destroyed one, while everyone laughed. Initially, the black woman sat in her corner, wrapped in the linen, shedding tears. But then she looked up and saw Adaluna. Like a rage-blind boar she rushed towards the maiden and gasped the words: "Thank you, you vicious magic connoisseur! The Moor will remember thee!"

Laughing, Ada replied, "Why did you take the black cat instead of the white one, as I said? How stupid you have been, how unspeakably stupid!"

Then the housekeeper looked down in confusion and stammered in shame, "So it would be true, the one about the mixed-up tomcats?" Lamenting, she wrung her hands, raised them imploringly to Ada, and

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lamented, "If it be so, my dear good Adaluna, guess, help: how can I escape the enchantment, how can I be redeemed?"

Ada stifled her laughter and said earnestly: "Dear housekeeper, this is easily done. At the next consecration night you will perform the same spell as today, but it must be with the white tomcat. Until then you will have to be patient." And the mischievous one added consolingly: "But what's the point of remaining a little Moor for a short year? You have grown young like a fresh womanly maiden. Look at the shiny black hair on your head, - how beautiful! Of course, more radiant beauty than Freya herself possesses, was intended for you, had you been spared your miserable mistake! O how foolish was thy action!"

The housekeeper burst into tears; she was destroyed. The queen with the maidens left the kitchen. In the women's hall, however, laughter and giggles kept sleep away from the mischievous court maidens for a long time, for everyone was happy to indulge the housekeeper in the prank played on her.

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Chapter Sixteen.

The Legate's Bridal Journey.

A few days ago, Caesar Valentinian had left Carnuntum. Yet no one would have noticed that the Hibernum Castrum no longer housed Caesar, had it not been for the absence of the Praetorians. Still in its atrium the clients crowded around the Proconsul's bisellium, for Caesar's orders had been so manifold and abundant that the Proconsul and his councils were overburdened with business for many weeks in advance.

"Hi, hi, hi! Praise be to Chance!" came the voice of the friendly Phanius from the crowd. He had just been discussing with friends the latest events of the day and had become aware of other acquaintances from whom he did not want to withhold his news.

"Greetings to you all! You consular Aedile and you, my valiant Petronius! Be greeted as all nine muses! How stands it, you friends? Are you dining with Marcellianus tonight?"

Those thus addressed stopped and shook the parasite's proffered hand. Licinius replied, "May Fortuna, Venus and Thesauros greet you as warmly as we do. Yes, we too are among the lucky ones. Something quite unfamiliar shall await us."

"Hi, hi, hi," chuckled the old man with a mysterious expression. "The Olympians might envy us for this; it will be greater than a Floriala! More beautiful slave girls I have never seen anywhere than destined for this feast of our princely friend!"

With that he nodded to the two and hurried after others to tell them the same.

Petronius, however, was too engrossed in the conversation that Phanius had interrupted by his communication to change the subject. He continued, "By the victorious Mithras, this promises to be a brilliant war effort. My old soldier's heart rejoices as if it were twenty years old! At last a Caesar has dared to call up the Legionaries who were often manipulated and assigned as tax

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executors, as litterarii, and as building experts, and to forbid such abuses. Thus the Legions are again full and ready to strike. Our good fourteenth is doubled. - Twenty thousand men! An imperial deed! Yet even more! The Gentes Markomanorum are transferred to Vindomina, and from there, when the Alpine passes are clear of snow, go deeper into the country; it is still undecided whether against the Dacians or even to Asia against the Parthians. This is wise. In the event of a second Marconian war they could easily become dangerous; but to the Parthians they certainly would not defect."

"Marcellianus has come over with orders to build roads and bridges in Quadia," remarked Licinius lightly, as if unintentionally, and added: "With the disappearance of the snow, construction is to begin."

"I heard say of that, too," was the veteran's indifferent reply.

"The lucky man Equitius is still moving to Acincum ⁽¹⁾ to venture from there on scouting trips to Quadia."

The veteran grew more excited; Licinius had planned this.

"He is a splendid boy after all, and resentment because of his good fortune cannot take root in my heart. He deserves his happiness. I want to press him to my heart!"

"Let it be!" gave the Aedile in reply with a slight sneer, "Agrippina does that instead of you."

The favorite of three Caesars widened his eyes; then, after a pause of astonishment, he said:

"Really!? - Well, that is also to be granted to him. Now I understand why he was banished to Acincum!"

"You think so?" retorted the Aedile with sarcasm. "You are astonishingly perceptive in fathoming the origins of events. And yet you are aware of the struggle for precedence between Marcellianus and Equitius, and you are among those invited to the victory feast of the newly appointed Magister armorum of Carnuntum!"

Now it seemed that understanding had come to the veteran. Thoughtfully he cradled his head and said, "That was more than boldness from Equitius! O, the hot-blooded, rash youth!"

But the Aedile laughed first of all, and said to the astonished man, "Friend, brother, centurion, pontifex maximus! Think of Aphrodite and Ares and of Hephaestus; of Helen and Paris, and good Menelaus; of gods and demigods! Yes, you may also think of deified emperors, e.g. Claudius!" Today we are long past such philandering; at most a Germanic bear could still be horrified by it. But I would have hoped for more worldly wisdom from the favorite of three Caesars. I am only amazed that Agrippina let herself be

(1) Today Budapest.

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snatched by Equitius. Valentinian is more powerful than I thought."

The veteran had not yet overcome his astonishment and said, "But by the all-knowing Mithras! What else but the jealousy of the Proconsul could remove the most capable soldier of Rome from Carnuntum, now, when he is most needed for the colony?"

"That very efficiency!" replied the Aedile. But he might have felt that he was saying too much, so he added softeningly: "He must complete the work he has begun. Now Acincum will be his base and then he will continue to follow the Danubius eastward to Pontus Euxinus."

"On and on eastward, then!" said Petronius, reflecting; "the poor boy! And Agrippina, will she console herself so easily?"

"She should be used to such things by now . . ." but the Aedile spoke no further. He had noticed the Curule-aedile in the bustle, and pulled Petronius away with him.

It was no less busy today in the Via sagularis. There stood a strange troop. Five magnificent wagons covered with tarpaulins, each drawn by four strong steeds, were waiting to leave. Girls' and women's heads looked out from under the white tarpaulins, slaves surrounded the wagons, here and there still mending the pack or bridle. A shapeless wagon wrapped in straw was particularly conspicuous. The curious bystanders murmured miracles about the splendor of this carriage, which the young legate had purchased only a few days ago. Yes, they wanted to know if it was intended for his future wife, who must have been no less than Caesar's daughter. A hundred legionaries and thirty horsemen were lined up along the city wall. It was the retinue that Caesar had appointed for the legate Equitius, in order to make him independent of the commanders of the individual castles. He should always be provided with everything necessary to be able to proceed unhindered everywhere according to his own decision. This was the real motive of Valentinian's special show of confidence, but nobody knew about it except him and Equitius. For all others, the team was considered merely a guard of honor. It is obvious that Equitius chose the most capable legionaries of the third cohort for himself.

Well wrapped in blankets, a handsome number of noble steeds were waiting for the ruler. Only the nomenclator Sixtus was mounted; he had earned the trust of his master in a high degree and was worthy of it.

Thus the families of the former centurion, which had consisted modestly of five slaves, had grown to the stately number of thirty slaves and twenty slave girls, and he, who a few moons ago carried all his belongings in a bread bag, was today going out of Carnuntum with the pomp of a prince.

Then Equitius stepped out of the barracks, which until now had served him as a dwelling. Once again he shook hands with his friends, saluted them here and there, then he mounted his steed and the procession duly formed up behind him. Beside the legate rode two other men. One was the commander

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of the small army, the Primipilar Festus, an old friend of Equitius, whom the latter had mounted at his expense and appointed to lead the team. The other was Sixtus.

Slowly they moved through the land slumbering under the snow. The cold had abated, so that the road quickly took on that dark brown that is the harbinger of a gentle thaw. Passing the place of the night adventure with the ghostly weavers, passing Erchantaug's round tower, the legate's train gained the height of the stone; already the Limes was sinking. From the cloudless sky, the sun was already sending down noticeably warming rays, and a gentle breeze was also blowing from the south. The road became damp and the snowy field seemed dewy. A few small streams trickled over the snow cover in shallow gullies, joining with others to seek the Danubius. The train had gained depth, but it still had to cross a second ridge similar to the Stein before it could descend into the great Pannonian plain. The depression now reached a basin in which lay an ancient Germanic settlement, which the Romans counted as part of Carnuntum. But it was much separated from Carnuntum by the stony hills, which is why it preserved its old character as faithfully as its old name Heunenburg.⁽³⁾

Here the legate stopped. He swung himself out of the saddle and ordered the train to cross the next promontory without him and to wait beyond it. He himself took a pilum⁽⁴⁾ of a legionary and prepared to stride across the cliff-stiffened ice cover of the Danubius.

Horror seized the nomenclator Sixtus as he saw through his master's scheme. "Dare not, my lord!" cried the faithful one with a mien of terror. "Last night was without frost, it thawed steadily. Without ceasing, the ice cover roars and cracks, and crushed between the drifting floes would you be, my lord, as between millstones, when the ice blast starts to move. And this can happen at any moment. Turn back and use the bridge!"

"Do you think me timid?" laughed the legate "Why do I not use the bridge? Because the way is nearer here. Do as I said; this sheet of ice, many man-heights thick, does not melt as quickly as the soft snow in the field."

Nevertheless, the danger of which Sixtus warned was not unknown to the legate; but reasons of many kinds commanded him not to use the bridge. He also thought he should wisely keep his plan hidden from Agrippina. This was also the reason why even Sixtus did not learn of the legate's plan and only now guessed it with abrupt horror.

The faithful Sixtus dared many more ideas, but it was of no use to him. The train started moving again without Equitius.

With shouldered pilum Equitius had descended to the bank of the stream.

(3) Today Hamburg. Also mentioned in the Nibelungenlied.

(4) Legionaries' lance.

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Like a glacial fracture of the wild alps of Rhaetia, the withered cliffs stared out at him, towering far above the expanse that the stream forms in summer. The Danubius never gains a smooth cover like a sluggishly creeping river or a motionless lake. The wild son of the Alps, nursed by glacier milk, is much too unruly to calmly put up with freezing. With giant force he must be beaten into Agez's icy fetters. Piece by piece, floe by floe, ice and snow cement them together, and so the cliff-like cover grows against the course of the stream and grows from bottom to top, so that small icebergs lift themselves in gradual growth from the stream's much-traveled mirror.

As if built for eternity, the ice chaos stood before Equitius, immobile and rigid. Winter's white mantle was spread over it, only here and there it shone greenish or bluish out of the gnarled layer of snow, and a deep, eerie sepulchral peace weighed on the terribly beautiful image of death.

Equitius strode along the crags of the promontory, immediately adjacent to the cliff edge of the stream, to where he was just opposite the steep slope of Maidenberg and the mouth of the Moravia.

With a vow to Poseidon, he started crossing the ice giant's bridge. A clanging and crashing sounded through the same, but it stood firm, seemingly for all eternity. Not without effort and danger, requiring many crossings, but less burdensome than wading in the soft snow of the shore, the legate found the untraveled adventurous path. Sooner than he had hoped, he had reached Schwanhild's rock dwelling.

Schwanhild had been waiting for him, ready to flee. She wore wintry clothes; a hooded cloak with many folds surrounded her figure, a small bundle lay on the ground.

Joy and apprehension were reflected in the girl's eye when she saw her beloved. "How beautiful you are in the fiery red cloak and helmet-bush and rich weapons!" This was the first exclamation of admiration, but sighing, she had added, throwing herself on the breast of the one who had entered: "How unwise! If you had been seen approaching, both our deaths would have been inevitable! Therefore hurry, before it is too late!"

Then she listened in horror, seized her bundle, and urged Equitius toward the exit, without giving him time to speak back. In a fear-stricken voice she whispered to him, "Already I hear the voice of Albruna; away, away!"

Soon the fugitives had reached the riverbank. Following his own trail, Equitius and his little nixie hurried through the ice debris of the sleeping Danubius. The girl climbed nimbly and deftly, so that it was not easy for the legate to follow Swanhild. Foreboding fear spurred her foot. Looking backward with fear and terror, forward with gray trembling, she hastened her flight ever more hastily. Behind her back she knew the pursuers, beneath her feet in ice shackles the goddess betrayed by her own priestess.

Suddenly, a paralyzing fright bound her feet. A shriek of anguish escaped from her wildly heaving chest. Convulsively she grasped the legate by the arm,

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pointed in the direction from whence she had fled, and gasped out the words with difficulty: "There, there, approaches the terrible fiend of the gods! And there, the Albruna and the sisters! They come to take me and thee to agonizing death!" "Let them come and haste, my good one!" said the legate, drawing her away. "Enough of iron I carry with me to send them all and more to Hecate!" But lamenting, Swanhild sank around his neck and said with tears: "You are only a man, and you fight without victory against the consecrated, for your and my beginnings are burdened with guilt, your sword splinters powerlessly under guilts' curse!"

"Take comfort, my beloved! Soon we will be on Roman soil, and there they will be powerless!" cried the legate, trying to force the timid one to continue her flight. But she replied, "You are mistaken! Nikuz, the mermaid king, cares little of the boundary stakes of the human kingdoms; as far as the limits of his power reach, so far he exercises it. heedless of you who do not believe in him!" Sobbing out loud, she threw herself on her knees and with a trembling, fear-stricken voice, she spoke this prayer intermittently: "You good woman Ise, you are also a wife, you are a mother, you too have loved and still love today! Do not punish your child so harshly because she loves! Do not let me fall into the hands of your dreadful faction! If it be Thy will, let me find mermaid death between ice and waters, only spare me from the dreadful one!" Weeping, she had collapsed. Then the legate plucked her up, lifted her on his shoulders and thus continued the flight. The god's foe had come closer, the mere sight of which robbed Swanhild of all composure.

Already the shout was clearly audible, with which the approaching one cheered the servants following him to the pursuit; no more time was to be lost. On the shore, however, Albruna and the sisters stood in a restlessly moving group, awaiting the arrival of the fugitives.

Straining all his strength, the legate hurried through the icy desert; already the shore beckoned. Then he felt the ground tremble beneath him; a singing and ringing struck his ear, which seemed to come from the depths, from above, from all sides.

In despair, Swanhild wrung her hands in Equitius' arms and cried: "Let me go, the gods are willing to let me atone for this outrage, let me go and flee! Gladly I die, knowing thee saved!" But Equitius rushed forward in mad haste to win the already near shore. And again Schwanhild spoke: "Do you hear the ringing and singing down there? Those are the mermaids and rites in Agez's ice dungeon! they wrathfully offer you and I as a sacrifice, as atonement for the breach of peace in the sacred free place! The hard shackles still resists the breach, therefore release yourself through me and hurry - hurry!"

Exhausted, she paused. Equitius, however, held her tightly and securely. He hurried through the cliffs and ice fissures with his valuable load, as Aeneas had once done through Troy's smoking ruins. Panting, he gave comfort to the

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timid one: "I will not leave you. - Victory or death with you. - Let no one scold me as a coward. - Courage, soon we'll stand on the shore!"

Again the ground swayed under the fleeing foot. A crunching and clanging trembled through the clanking, the ice blocks began to sway, the bound current had broken the ice shackles of Agez the terrible. A cry of horror escaped from Schwanhild's chest, in mute surrender the legate stared at the ghastly picture. Breathing a sigh of relief, as if freed from anxious worry, Schwanhild slipped from the legate's shoulder and sank into his arms with hot tears. Then she said with melancholy: "The goddess has granted my request. From the god's will we are saved to death together. Now I am brave, my Equitius; this death I fear not."

"But even this death I will snatch from you; I am not yet defeated!" cried Equitius defiantly, looking around.

There it looked terrible enough. Horrible roars, never-before-heard thunder rippled through the air, pith-piercing crunching sounded through the wavering ice bed, which quiveringly whimpered and groaned, as if it wanted to give birth to a world. Ice cliffs wavered, jagged ice fell, and rumbling spring tides gurgled foaming through the gaping cracks. The unpredictable cliff face, with one blow full of movement and as if alive, shifted eastward under ear-splitting crunching and screeching, crashing and rumbling. The previously deathly stiff ice field was suddenly transformed into a liquid ice stream; ice and water married, united in love or in hate to the fight, shot along in the ghastly battle. There appeared a funnel full of foaming eddies, where only a moment ago the eye saw an ice needle playing in the sunlight with all seven colors of the holy rainbow. But already the eddies dried up, because an ice plate pushed itself up, large enough, in order to build on it a watchtower. The current, however, played with the colossus as if it were a wind-blown shingle.

Then a hoarse cry of anguish reached the ears of the lovers, who held each other close. From a splintering slab of ice the Godfront was hurled far away in an arc and slid through the jagged and swinging reefs to a spear's length in front of the fleeing couple. For a while they saw his face rigid with horror, then the floes had seized him and crunched him.

Like a child's unbridled wail, the Godfront's howl of fear trembled in the terrible crunching of ice. Bloody foam splashed up, then that too was over.

With the speed of chasing clouds the ice block drifted downstream, carrying the two, swaying like a sea-going ship and rudderless like a wreck.

Still they saw the hand-wringing crowd of sisters on the shore, still they saw how one pursuer after the other sank, then they were alone in the far periphery of the monstrous turmoil of the ice forces. The familiar shores slipped from their gaze, and the Maidenbergs sank into the sun-drenched mist

Equitius had pressed the pondering girl to his breast and sought to comfort her; but only now did her strong courage show itself. "My Equitius,"

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she spoke, lowering her full eye into his, in a warm, convincing tone, "we are saved to our love! The good Lady Ise has heard more than my prayer; the ghastly death of the Godfront at our feet made known this. The greatest danger, the wrath of the goddess, has vanished; the next greatest danger, despondency, must now be conquered with heroic defiance. Now we wait until our ice raft approaches the right shore; and then it is time to jump bravely to win the land!" At this she kept a sharp lookout, so as not to miss anything.

The legate's confidence in rescue was also revived by Swanhild's timid trust. He looked at her for a long time with a fervent gaze, then he said: "You think wisely and advise well. Listen, I have vowed to consecrate an altar stone to Poseidon, and I will erect it on that shore where we both find salvation. Surely he will hear my prayer and vow."

The floe drifted around a promontory, and the two were offered a view of a vast snowy expanse.

"Look there, the horsemen and chariots and the armed band. With these I had hoped to ride by thy side; they are my retinue!" The legate shouted in a trembling voice. Then he tore his sagum, his sash, from his armpit, fastened it to his pilum, and waved it like a flag toward his people. He saw that he was noticed; he also saw the three foremost horsemen dashing along the Limes at a racing gallop, but what could the speed of a steed do against the lightning speed of the Danube's icy horsemen! Soon the riders were out of sight of those kidnapped by the ice.

Incessantly, however, it thundered and roared, hissed and crunched around the lovers' ice raft. The floes next to the floating ice island, which was gradually shrinking in size due to the abrasive force of the debris, loomed eerily.

Then Swanhilde resumed the conversation: "I, too, my brave Equitius, have made a vow; I, too, will consecrate an altar to the benevolent All-Mother Ise there, where we will emerge from the river saved. But since the gods have betrothed us to each other in mortal danger, let us already call each other by our married names. So also may our two altars unite to a common consecration altar to your god and my goddess. Are you satisfied, my dear husband?"

He was satisfied, and they embraced at the hoped for salvation.

But the circumference of the floe diminished alarmingly, and its swaying became more and more irregular and threatening to topple.

Then Schwanhilden's scouting eye discovered a large table-shaped ice floe, on which a stag and a bear peacefully passed the common danger. "We must win this one!" she said and jumped with the agility of a wildcat onto the next floe. But the girl's leap caused the abandoned slab to sway in such a way that Equitius fell down. Before he was able to rise, Schwanhilden's plate had already rushed far ahead of his in the uneven ice crowd.

Both were seized by the same horror; but there was no time to think about

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it, if they did not want to remain separated forever. With contempt for death and foolhardiness, Swanhild and Equitius changed floes to reunite. As chance would have it, a floe carrying the legate drifted just past the land. A single jump could have saved him. He did not take that leap. Better common death than a lonely life; so he thought and jumped on from floe to floe. They had no regard for current or shore, only each other in sight and in mind. This desperate struggle lasted a long time, the jumping from floe to cliff, from slab to floating ice sheet. Finally, they met on a wide sheet of ice, and with tears of joy in their eyes, they sank exhausted into each other's arms.

The sun was already low in the west. They had only a short time left to save themselves; spending the night on the drifting ice would have been certain death. For a long time, the mountains on both sides of the shore had been out of sight; a tangle of meadows and islands narrowed the view. But the current grew wider. Its speed decreased and with it the danger. The ice masses flowed more calmly, the thundering and crunching had ceased and given way to the roar of the waves. Dirty-yellow water became noticeable between the individual floes. New courage revived the lovers. Now Equitius took hold of his pilum and steered his unyielding ice raft with it. More and more they drifted toward the right bank.

"You have done splendidly!" cried Schwanhild joyfully. "Do you see the island there? We are drifting past it on the right; it is the great Schütt. If we were to pass it on the left, we would fall into the hands of my pursuers. For there dwell the Quades of the Wahagaha⁽⁵⁾. Search, my beloved husband, still the "small Schütt" northward to find, then we are saved. Dead arms take us up, and easily we shall win the right bank."

Astonished, Equitius looked at his companion; it was difficult for him to explain how she knew these inhospitable stream areas so well. But he did not put this astonishment into words; he had no leisure to do so. Swanhild, however, guessed him and said with a smile:

"Do you think the mermaid does not know her kingdom?" He smilingly replied: "If I believed in your mermaidhood, you would have had to conceal many things from me. I know very well that you are a mortal woman and only a priestess." "Well," replied Schwanhild, "that is a lie; but here stood my father's castle and therefore this place is known to me."

But the ice raft drifted slower and slower. Then the legate took his round shield and tied it to the pilum like a paddle, in order to steer the journey more toward the shore. Schwanhild helped to push off the obstructing side floes with the legate's sword. Thus it was possible to keep the intended direction.

But the river became wider and wider, the floes more and more isolated, the Danubius seemed to have become a lake. There Schwanhild had perceived

(5) Today the Vah River in Slovakia.

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with fright a new danger. Lamenting, she exclaimed: "The river has overflowed its banks, and now we are wandering over sunken land, not knowing whether it is our friend's or our enemy's." The courage she had so long steadfastly preserved seemed now to desert her. Powerless, she sank down at Equitius' feet. But the legate comforted her, without stopping his work, by saying: "Be of good cheer, my dear! Now I know that I am saved! We are heading for Arabona, there we will find shelter and wait for my entourage! Courage, my heroic love!"

Then he felt ground under the floe; a cry of joy escaped him. He quickly untied the shield from the pilum and used it like a grappling hook to push the ice raft. Thus it went easier than before with the rowing.

Trees and shrubbery protruded from the tide, and a few abandoned homesteads peered out of the waters. Equitius could easily determine the direction of the Limes from these features. The homesteads multiplied, including many that he recognized by shape and layout as veteran's properties. It was clear to him that he would soon have to reach Arabona.

Therefore, he again fastened his red sagum to the pilum and waved it in the rays of the sinking daylight. Like a lake of fire, the vast watery desert shone in the glow of the setting sun; like swans, the ice floes glided over the glittering tide.

Equitius stood upright, leaning on his pilum, Swanhild leaning on his shoulder; both silent, as if lost in silent prayer, followed the departing sun with their gazes. A gentle breeze lifted the sagum like a sail; slowly the slab of ice drew toward the castle.

The sun was submerged behind the distant horizon. Glowing clouds drifted over the darkening dome of the sky, from which isolated stars began to shyly shine. In the reddish glow, the full disk of the still rayless moon rose above the surface of the water, which swayingly threw back its image. The contours of the landscape became more indistinct, trees and farmsteads blurred into indeterminable shadow formations. Far away on the horizon, a crenellated tower stood out in sharp silhouette, and a few illuminated windows indicated that human dwellings were no longer far away. It had become darker. It seemed as if single stars had descended to bathe in the dark tide. At the farthest borders of the incalculable watery desert, however, mountains miles away swung in indeterminate wavy lines like the shores of a mighty lake. Deep silence, no life all around.

Wistful at the strange picture, the legate spoke: "My good Swanhild, look at this picture! How beautiful! So, and even more beautiful, the moon also rests on the magnificent Sinus Tarentinum. Oh, if we were there, if only this ice raft were one of the beautifully beaked fishing barges! How beautifully is not my hometown Tarentum reflected in the blue wave of the sea! O, my beautiful Italia! Take courage, my love, gather the last of your strength, soon

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we shall be saved!"

"My good Equitius!" said the girl. "Still I feel strong and brave, also I hope still to behold thy fair Italia. But the Danube, too, is enchanting, when the foam-born Freya's holy star bathes itself in its blue flood, and the sacred groves rush whispering. How beautiful she will appear to me only at your side!"

With that, she snuggled closer to the legate.

"Yes, you are right, my love!" said the legate. "If this were a Liburne, even this journey would be beautiful! Never would I break away from your arms; but you need drink and food and a warming fire; so let me worry about finding shelter soon. Then Hymenaeos' torches shall unite us to a lasting happy union."

After a heartfelt kiss, he spread his legate sagum for Schwanhild as a camp and began again with all his strength to take up his gondolier services.

But his strength was exhausted; hardly did he think he could reach the nearby tower.

At last the ice floe crunched against the humpbacked blocks of the tower. It was high time, because Equitius could hardly keep himself on his feet.

After many a futile cry for help, the guard at the tower finally became aware of the caller on the strange vehicle and arranged for the landed men to be brought in.

Soon the beat of oars was heard, and a small rescue boat, illuminated by the glow of a torch, rounded the black walls and headed for their icefall.

With tears of relief, the rescued lazed in each other's arms.

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Chapter Seventeen

Human Sacrifice

Erchantaug sat in the round portico of his sunken castle, in the ring of his eleven hereditary men. He watched the council.

Individually they had ridden through the districts of the Germans, equally armed, with the same name, to be considered as one. The miracles should have bent the defiant minds of the many individual kings, and persuasion should have done the rest. Jealousy, brooding misgivings and special interests made them averse to the idea of subordinating themselves to a supreme king; indeed, the already seemingly achieved unity of the Germans was alarmingly shaken. Not open apostasy, not rebelliousness had paralyzed the power of the young German crown; none of the kings and princes had dared to do so. But to delay the succession with meaningless reasons, to thwart with indecisive fickleness every bold plan of Gambin, this seemed to the small kings the right means to show their power to the great. Thus, in Stilifrida, the Palatinate saw one Imperial Diet after another come and go without even the most insignificant step forward being taken.

On the other hand, the cunning and energetic Valentinian had spun his nets ever wider and had known how to achieve his ends in a roundabout way even where he seemed to be forced to take the circumstances into account. By cunningly using the passions of his stubborn imperial officials, he was able not only to push through his plans, but also to accelerate them where they thought he had made them impossible.

He had well understood the background of the Proconsul's advice to remove Equitius from Carnuntum, but he also knew that Equitius would not hesitate to build the castles and roads in the Quadenland. Therefore he went along with the Proconsul's plan, for he did not doubt that Marcellianus, the Proconsul's son, having determined the points and lines, would without hesitation begin the construction. He let the little fellows rejoice in the great success they had dreamed of, while they were only helping to promote the

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work of their most hated enemy.

These contrasts in the nature of the German federation of peoples and the unified Rome were only too well known to Erchantaug; he and his eleven had ridden through all the districts and told the lords of the men about them.

What a strong army king would never have succeeded in doing, Erchantaug's cunning achieved. The mysterious appearance of his eleven, who were considered to be of honor and therefore appeared everywhere at the same time, had left no doubt about their divine mission, all kings and princes bowed to the mighty will of the king of the gods and the endangered German unity was saved. But Erchantaug also recognized that it was his task to consolidate and preserve this unity, which had been hard won but even harder to maintain, for future times.

He had received all the reports; thereupon he spoke from the high seat:

"You have faithfully kept my word; my thanks are assured. The time is not far off when this castle will rise from the earth to become the glorious palace of King Austrorand. Erchantaug sinks into the depths of the mountain to a hundred-year sleep. But you are called to be King Austrorand's paladins. You gain, disenchanted to the earth, each a castle with rich lands, with servants and gold-horned herds, and, moved, you shall produce generations, flourishing to the last of the days! But not everything is done yet. You have directed the defiant mind of the proud kings, you have forced them to the army and gathered the army, but it is still untrained, it still lacks siege weapons. But they are known to you. You have built them with my quarxes in the caves of the stone and learned to use them for the fight against Rome. You know they are saved for the day that is set, for the judgment of Carnuntum."

"Therefore you, Aistmuth, shall make a new journey to Gambin, the king of the Germans. Thou shalt teach him to build such an army, thou shalt teach his peoples to fight legion by legion after the manner of the Romans. He, as the king chosen by the Warfather, shall then announce this news to the other kings and their peoples as the emblem of the Odin crown. It is also a warning and punishment for defiance and default of the others".

Then old Erchantaug gave Aistmuth many more instructions for the journey.

Thereupon he seized his bugle and made three mighty shouts with it, so that it thundered through the hall.

For a while, everyone sat silently in the ring. Then the curtain of the hall rose. The housemaster Inwalt entered the round hall with a strange entourage.

Twelve quarxes were led in by Inwalt. They were holding leather sacks over their heads, which prevented them from seeing, and were lined up with their necks on a long chain, the end of which was held in the hand of the Housemaster. He placed the twelve in front of the high seat, bent one knee to Erchantaug and said: "My God and King! These are the twelve that you have

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honored. Four blacksmiths, four carpenters and four workers, who can do nothing else but haul stones. But all the twelve are most worthy of Thy grace, as Thou didst command to be chosen."

Then Erchantaug said: "Listen, you Quarxes! All of you have forfeited life, but you shall have mercy. You have to help to accomplish a work which, after its success, shall make you human again and enable you to return to the upper world as such. But inevitably you must carry out the commandments you are given. Also this is law for you: Silence, mute like the fish in the water, and also what you see or hear! I could cut out your tongues, but I want to spare you, therefore be silent! You have to obey totally the swan-shield, which leads you. The slightest misstep or a spoken word is your death! The culprit is immediately hanged on the nearest nail or branch, and the others, bound to him by the chain, remain chained to him until the sun of the coming day stands on the same point. Now be silent and obey!"

Turning to Aistmuth, Erchantaug said that each of the twelve quarxes would carry a suit of armor, complete with weapons, on his back. These twelve armors were intended for the twelve youths for their sword ceremony on Balder's Day, which at that time honored the guest Erchantaug at Stilifrida with a sword dance.

Aistmuth then left the round hall with the quarxes and led them to the great cave. This was filled with blades and catapults in great numbers. There also waited the quarxes and Aistmuth's White Horse. Soon Aistmuth's quarxes had taken the loads on their backs, and away went the strange procession across the same bridge over which, on that stormy night, Erchantaug and Gisalhild had set out to ride to Stilifrida.

Aistmuth rode in front on a stately white steed in a silver sparkling breastplate, the silver swan on his helmet and on his pointed long shield. The silver swan also shone from the spear's blue flag. On a long chain behind him walked the dwarves in disguise, carrying baskets on their backs, in them their tools of trade along with the weapons and the armor for the twelve sword dancers. Slowly they had risen from the cave, slowly the bridge had sunk behind them, slowly they moved through the night-dark forest, and countless stars twinkled down on the passing swans. Sparsely sprouting lentil green did not yet prevent the starlight from penetrating through the forest branches.

Aistmuth's train had finally reached the Danube by stealth. It was at the same place where, a few weeks ago, Equitius had begun the trek across the river's treacherous ice bridge. Aistmuth's steed had hardly reached the shore when a ferry pushed off from the next island, where it lay hidden by the bushes, and docked in front of Aistmuth on the bank. Three ferrymen silently performed their duties. Aistmuth was dismounted and silently led his steed into the ferry. Silently, the three ferrymen helped the twelve Quarxes to board the ferry. Then they pushed off from the land. All this took place without a word, without a greeting, without a wave, silently mysterious, as if guided by a

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higher power, as if done by ghostly beings.

With long poles they pushed the vehicle through the still water along the sandbanks and floodplains to gain the main stream. There, two men put the rudders, one in front, the other behind, and waited for the moment when the ship would be caught by the current. This happened. The force of the current suddenly jerked the vessel around, throwing it far out into the stream. Now the rudder rods creaked. The current itself gave the speed, only the direction was given by the two rudders. They were already close to the mouth of the Moravian river. Then the third ferryman took a thin line in his mouth and jumped overboard with it. Swimming, he reached the shore. There he pulled a strong rope to the shore with the thin line, which he quickly looped around a tree a few times. Soon the rope was taut and the ship landed. Three strong steeds, which had been standing in the ferry until then, were now brought to the shore, connected to the ferry by a hauling rope, whereupon the journey through the Marahabia was continued upstream.

But this, too, was done quietly. Silently, the third ferryman had swung himself onto the last of the draft horses, and without a crack of the whip the steeds came into step. Just as silently, the two ferryman who remained on board steered the course of the ferry with rudder and grappling hook.

Aistmuth had fastened the end of the neck chain of the twelve quarxes to a ring in the vehicle and had then stood with his steed in front in the bow of the ship. A beautifully curved silver swan also shone at the bow.

So he stood for a long time, his arm leaning on the crest of his steed, and gazed pensively over the floodplains, which gradually began to emerge from the twilight veil folds.

Then a soft mood came over him. He went to the back, where the quarxes lay on the ground. Their heads were still poking into their leather bags.

"Hey, lads!" he called to them. "Do you want to see the upper world? I shall not hide it from you, but if you are docile and silent, it shall be granted you."

They had been lying motionless. Now they began to stir and raised their hands in supplication; none dared to speak. Satisfied with this, Aistmuth loosened their caps and ordered them to fasten them to their belts. Confused and stunned, they all checked their eyes in the long-drawn-out wide-angle view and greedily took the fresh Lenz air into their lungs.

Aistmuth had already loosened the cap on six of them; on the seventh, however, the bright blush of anger rose to his face. It was the Quarx Haso, who had formerly been the philosopher Aristippus Dercylides. Haso, too, had recognized his mortal enemy at once; his appearance announced a rigid fright. But how Haso had changed! He had turned gray and his face pale. His countenances had lost the sneer, the expression of lechery, and instead of insolent self-confidence they bore the stamp of cowardly servility and self-

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contempt. Not anger, not hatred, not the desire for revenge was reflected in his eyes fixed on Aistmuth, only petrifying horror, and nameless fear was to be read from the look of the former slanderer. At the sight of this mournful expression, Aistmuth's hatred turned to contempt; he turned away to relieve the rest of the caps.

Now the first rays of the morning sun were gliding over the peaks of the floodplain forest, and the delicate light blue of the spring sky lay luminously over the land.

Here and there playful sunlight dotted the sandbanks, from which thousands of small shells shone crystal-bright. Next to them were the greenish-blue waves that rippled along the sides of the ship, teasingly tossing each other the sunrays they had caught. The ship glided past dead watercourses with their wide gravel banks. From the brown marshy puddles between them, young willows and reeds were already rising in the fresh green. Out of them flocks of little sandpipers and the cute plovers escaped with long-drawn-out calls as the ship's train approached. Wild geese and mallards fluttered up, chattering and screeching, fleeing from their nests in fright, while sunbathing toads and frogs, startled, plopped into the water with a loud splash and sought refuge. The salamander laboriously wove its way through the mud to gain the river, in which it disappeared as fast as an arrow. Also shining otters and vipers sought their salvation in hastiest escape, because each animal had smelled its hereditary enemy, the nearby human.

Tall row grasses nodded from the higher edges of the banks, and shining in bright golden green, woodland vines and wild hops climbed up in the dark shade of elms. Lovely scents of violet and the strong smell of countless willow, alder and poplar species wafted out of it. Buzzing pigeons, hoarse ravens and cawing crows sat in their nests or scurried through the air. But high up in the tangle of branches of the alluvial forest giants, like defiant rock castles, the nests of birds of prey looked down on the small nation of feathered meadow inhabitants. The queens and princesses of the birds sat in proud repose in these nests, while the kings and princes hovered in the sunbeams, high above all that crept and flew, despising the proximity to the earth.

Bored like Greek philosophers, gray herons stood motionless on one leg at the edge of the gravel banks or strode gracefully along like Roman augurs. Pheasants flew up noisily, and rusty-brown marsh harriers fluttered up in prancing flight. Curiously, a shy deer peered through the bushes at the passing ship, or a mighty stag plunged into the river, fleeing from the draft horses. Herring gulls skirted the sandbars, and rustling caribou fluttered around the loess quarries. Countless other fowl, whistling and chirping, buzzing and squawking, rumbling and screaming, enlivened the sunny floodplains in the cheerful budding spring life of reawakened nature.

Through this living restlessness of nature the ship of the silent ones passed like the ferry of the dead.

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Gambin, under the illusion of divine revelation from the Albruna of Stilifrida, had learned everything that Erchantaug had planned and put into action, just as nothing of Valentinian's plans had remained hidden from him. Now Gambin spoke of the revelations he had received to the assembly of German princes and kings that had just met in Stilifrida. How Marcellianus, the proconsul's son, had crossed the Danube with ten thousand men and a thousand horsemen and had begun to build a castle on Hiermon's sacred three-way, which unites the roads of Vindomina, Carnuntum and Stilifrida, after he had made camp. With great festivities, he himself broke ground and proudly called the future building "Castrum Valentinianum". Also he knew to report that the Romans had dared to begin the construction of a castle on the ancient freehold of the Maidenber, the highly sacred "Thebes". He added with pain that, despite all these threatening facts, one Reichstag after the other went on without purpose, with an incredible output of words but meager deeds and even less good will. In laboriously restrained anger Gambin concluded this speech with the words:

"If your host were already approaching, as you promised, we would go across the Danube, and the Roman would not have built even a stone oven on our soil!"

Then Makrian, the king of the Alemanni, rose and spoke thus:

"Why dost thou not seek alliance with the Sarmatians, as we have learned? They also sit on the Danube next to you Quads, and are as much in need of daily work with sword and shield as you are! Then our auxiliary peoples shall join you, the most endangered among us. But we Germans alone are no match for the Romans. It may also be wise to think of giving your Sarmatians some fighting work, for they are ravenous. If you are beyond the Danube, he will burn Stilifrida out of you. I warned you!"

In an excited tone with a reddened face Gambin answered: "King Makrian! You have said many a true thing in the past, but you are ignorant of the facts of Marahabia as well as of Wahagaha. It is false that we are not covered against the Sarmatians. My Markland, the broad strip of land from the Marahabia to beyond the Wahagaha, is sufficiently occupied by defiant Quads and well-mounted Marcomann. In a long line of proud castles there sit my border counts all the way down to the Danube, where my valiant Count Rudegar sits at Komorn, in the face of the Roman Bregetio. These border counts are already fighting off the Sarmatians; don't worry! I say to myself, better the Slav for an enemy than for a friend! It is the way of the Sarmatians to hinder all prudent actions in the field by greed for booty, and even to endanger victory. At the moment of decision, however, he threatens to defect to the enemy. If the Sarmatian were to march through my entire kingdom, it would be less of a misfortune than if he were to fight on our side as a confederate, for disloyalty has always been his banner and will always remain

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so. Consider this, O kings and lords, and give speedy aid. Renounce the Sarmatian alliance; my border counts protect the German eastern border. But this shall be done: the Sarmatian shall be ordered to cross the Danube, the Dacer likewise; both shall be armies in Pannonia. But not as our comrades: may the sword points prevent that!"

Then the Thuringian count Arnulph rose and took the floor:

"Like a wise counselor, our federal king Gambin has spoken; but my counsel also seems good to me, therefore hear! If the German, the Sarmatian, the Dacer fight individually, as before the Cheruscan, the Batte, the Chatte and others, nothing is won, for individually we will be defeated by the all-powerful Rome. Never one is powerful enough! Never has a battle king too many confederates! If an army king has many covenant peoples, what harm is it to him if one of them is faithless? He is powerful enough to destroy it! Therefore make alliance with Sarmatians and Dacians, then the Sarmatian is wedged between us and Rome's most terrible enemy, the Dacian, and will be crushed if he disobeys!"

Agitated, Gambin sprang to his feet again and fell to talking to Arnulph: "Badly enough are you advised, Thuringian Count! It is not the Dacer who is Rome's most feared enemy, but the few Germans! Let it be said again: united and without confederates, who only hinder and endanger us, we are invincible. Have you completely forgotten Wuotan's promises, have you forgotten what the Norn in Salvation Council sang to you here today in this hall? Never do Wuotan and Swantewit join hands in union! Notice, I beg you, kings, notice, it is not the Quad ruler Gambin, but your covenant king Gambin who speaks to you. I have your welfare in mind more than mine!"

It would undoubtedly have gone on like this for a long time, had not Suntarolt's patience suddenly come to an end. Old Hagestalde had not sat quietly on the mead bench for a long time; he had accompanied the many unnecessary speeches with signs of angry impatience. Now he had had enough. With a mighty blow of his fist he made his shield boom, then jumped up and shouted with a raging snort over the assembly: "Blitz and blue fire! Even if you were kings, and even if you were gods, such useless verbiage would still be too stupid for all the Roman spoilers! Outside the gate the Romans are already building two castles, and here you are haggling and bargaining for the help you have been summoned to give? - King Gambin! Sink the German crown into the Danube flood, there, where the fish dives deepest, and disdain to ask for it again! You, king of the Quads and Marchmen, are powerful enough to throw the stone bakers across the Danube. Up! Sound the bugle, let the Kraian fires blaze and lead us to Carnunt, to Rome, to Byzantium! We will sacrifice the ropemaker's son ⁽¹⁾ to Wuotan on

(1) Caesar Valentinian was a ropemaker's son. Death by hanging was considered a sacrifice to Wuotan.

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ropes from his father! King, consider it! Four hundred years have passed since we Quades and Marchmen were defeated by Rome and stand here on the Danube. We have needed no protection, no help, and no tribesmen! It is they who need our help; but because the Roman does not yet hunt, forge, bake stones in their lands, they still find fault with the magic words of prophecy! Therefore, king, lower the crown to the fish, it is useful no more!"

Now there was a huge commotion in the hall, since no one was comfortable with the truth, least of all the kings. And there were enough of them in the palace. Suntarolt would have suffered badly enough, and Gambin would never have been able to protect him from the wrath of the angry. Only his iron ring protected him; none of the kings dared to lay a hand on the Wuotan devotee.

It was difficult for Gambin to restore order and tranquility in the assembly.

Many other things were discussed and discussed again, and the discussion would never have ended if Gambin had not accepted the demand to conclude an alliance with the Sarmatians. On the other hand, they all swore to join the German king's army with their peoples on the plain of Stilifrida on the next day.

It was decided to send an envoy to the Proconsul to complain to Carnuntum about the castle building, this breach of the peace and to demand the withdrawal of the Romans from the Quadenland. These negotiations were to delay the outbreak of the war until after the harvest, so that such a huge army in enemy territory would be easier to supply.

Thus, this Diet was also closed. But the kings and lords were still sitting in the royal chamber of Gambin, indulging in the pleasures of the table and listening to Bragewalt's heroic songs, when Randmar, the marshal, made a strange announcement.

A well-trimmed ship was lying down at the water gate of the city, pulled by three tugs, led by three guards. A silver swan adorned the stern, a silver swan formed the ship's master's crest, a silver swan waved from the banner and such a one shone from the blue shield of the wonderful one, who was surely a swan. His followers are adventurous. His twelve men are dressed in red leggings and gray waders with hoods in the style of quarxes, which he carries with him as prisoners on a long chain. He would answer to no one, only to the King of the Germans would he entrust his trade and the message of the one who sent him.

This was the marshal's report. Gambin breathed a sigh of relief, for he suspected that the king of the gods was approaching.

The swan knight rode through the castle gate into Stilifrida, behind him the quarxes on the chain. They carried the armor on their backs unpacked. Stilifrida's castle folk were astonished to see the strange getup. None of them would have dared to touch one of the twelve, least of all the last one, for the fairy tale of the "Swan-kleb-an" had come horribly to their minds. They also

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did not like the number thirteen.

Aistmuth had entered the king's chamber, the quarxes with him. He strode up to Gambin's high seat and honored the king with a bow. The fact that he wore his hair untrimmed and yet was a servant, that he did not greet the king by bowing his knees, told all present that the one who sent him must be more powerful than Gambin and all his table companions put together. It was clear to all that he was a messenger of the gods. Therefore also Gambin stepped from the high seat to meet him and offered him the Welcome himself. Handing him the filled horn, the king saluted him: "The King of the Germans salutes you and the one who sent himself, Swan Traveller, in you! Drink the Welcome to the honor of my sender, to your and my honor; it will be good for all of us!

With decorum, the guest had taken the offered horn from the hand of the king and spoke bowing: "Greetings to thou, German king, from the one who sent me and from me. Greetings also to the German Reichstag, if it is united, true and German! This Minnetrunk is consecrated to you, King Gambin, and to all German princes, who serve the German cause without any fraud or falsehood. Every drop a victory of the invincible German unity!"

This toast, this Minne saying, sounded unkindly in the ears of some of the guest kings; but when they saw with what noble decency the swan's neck emptied the horn without heel or sway, the hall was filled with murmurs of approval, for few had yet done such masterly drinking.

But already the guest spoke, leaning on his shield:

"You have granted me the right name, King Gambin; let that be enough for you, ask no more! I was sent from other worlds and my mission is to teach you to build and to use mechanical devices to break down walls. Therefore listen to Allfather's will! Like the golden hair the dwarves stole from Sif's head, ⁽²⁾ so shall the light of the German swords illuminate the Carnuntum Forum! Therefore give me, O king, carpenters and smiths, as many as you are able, give me forest that can be cut and iron that can be forged. Skilled dwarfs I lead with me, to teach his own forging and carpentry better. Behold these twelve breasts, twelve helmets, swords and shafts, shields and saxes, which are forged nine spans deep in the bowels of the earth by this dwarf. From this you can tell whether his forge has reached the final goal of the art. These are the twelve armors for your twelve sword dancers, as Erchantaug promised them to you! You see that the dwarves who know the art forged these weapons. This is enough of a guarantee for future work!"

At the beckoning of Aistmuth, the Quarxes set down the twelve pieces of armor in front of the high seat. Now Strangolf, the freeman, took the chain

(2) Siebia, Donar's wife = the earth; her golden hair the ripe grain. The robbery of this golden hair is therefore a mystical image for the harvest.

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from Aistmuth's hands and led the dwarves out of the hall. He had taken them into strict custody for the duration of their stay in Stilifrida.

The weapons were greatly admired; indeed, some of the princes envied the carriers, who were still unknown to them, since their own armaments could hardly be compared to them.

Then the speeches began anew. Gambin was pleased to be able to welcome the Wuotan envoy at a good hour, since all German kings and princes were guests of his and now had the opportunity to learn how to build and use the devices themselves. Aistmuth had much to tell about it. He explained how it consisted of wooden towers, which were pushed against the walls in order to be able to climb them, or of battering rams in order to knock down the strongest walls. Even huge slingshots, in order to throw stones, lumps of lead or burning impalements into the besieged castle, were to be built and immediately placed on rafts, ready for the journey to Carnuntum. Then they talked about how the order of battle should be set up in the German army to be able to withstand the Romans.

Most of the kings and princes were astonished, and some of them began to understand that it would take more than just being able to swing a sword to be able to fight the Romans victoriously. But when they heard that it was Victory's will that they should fight in Roman territory, where there were too many treasures to be carried off in all the shields of the army, even the most timid were overcome with fear, and they joyfully struck their shields, renewing their vows of allegiance.

Aistmuth was hardly able to answer all the questioners, and so what Niemaier had experienced happened; Bragewalt's singing mouth remained closed and silent today.

Lively activity enlivened the good Stilifrida in the coming days. The forest resounded with axe blows and the crash of falling logs. Heavy stallions dragged the felled logs to Marahabia, where the carpenter's yard had been laid out behind the town. There, for the time being, the rafts were timbered, on which the towers and catapults, the assault rams and the rest of the mechanicals were built.

It was a distinguished rooming place, for Gambin like Makrian, Arnulph like the Hagestalde and all the other noble sword-wielders got to swing the axe in joyful carpenter's day-work as if they had never rode a warhorse. Other many noble men, lords and masters, worked on the forges with the blacksmiths as their journeymen, so that the sparks flew under the steady beat of powerful hammers. The swan's herald also did his best. The palace kept his light armor, while he, wrapped in animal skins, worked with the blacksmiths and the carpenters.

The women, the queen first, were also present. They offered the carpentering and forging royal guests many a cool drink and switched on the

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cauldrons and roasting spits that had been set up outdoors, since the meal was also enjoyed outdoors.

Between the cauldrons, however, the housekeeper and the strumpets were busy. She had not become any gentler, although she had already lost her Moorish color.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the royal blacksmiths and carpenters, the Quarxes worked quietly and silently with somber expressions; the king's blacksmiths beside them, listening to and using their superior art.

One day, the first ballista was ready on the raft. Its power was tested with a loud hoiho. Then the first projectile flew. In a wide arc it jumped over the Marahabia and hit the trunk of an alder tree with a loud roar, so that it lifted itself with its roots out of the loosening fracture and rolled down into the river. With a loud cry of anguish, floodplain birds took to the air. The unending cheers of the king's guests and the townspeople rewarded this master shot. The king was beside himself with joy; Suntarolt, however, shouted in high enthusiasm: "By the giant's nine-headed great-grandmother, king! The next Roman ambassadorial beast that comes to Stilifrida, send him home with the ballista! it goes faster and you save a horse!"

Now Aistmuth showed not only how to handle the new remote weapon, but also how to attack and destroy it. The German lords learned a lot in this double lesson. The Roman way of fighting became more familiar to them and therefore less fearsome. The new ballista was superior to the Roman one in many ways, especially in that it was mobile, while the latter was immovably fixed.

Restlessly, the construction of the weapons continued, but the kings no longer wielded axes and hammers, for other things awaited them.

Aistmuth led the townspeople of Stilifrida to a mock battle in order to train them in mass combat in the manner of the Romans. Here, too, there was much to amaze the lords of men when Aistmuth explained to them how and why.

Thus Gambin's people were equipped and trained. The swan knight advised the king to provide Stilifrida's ramparts with mechanical weapons as well, so that they would better resist a siege that was to be expected. Also, as much as possible, the other main places should receive such distance weapons.

That is why the big work area was now moved to Stilifrida's market place, where now the silent dwarves worked next to Stilifrida's carpenters and blacksmiths.

It is true that Gambin and his guests were no longer involved in the construction of the weapons, nor was Aistmuth himself. But the logs in the forest were still chosen by the king himself and he decided which ones to cut.

So it happened that Gambin was almost always in the forest. The gentle sun of spring had also lured Frau Gotelind and Gisalhild out into the oak forest, and so it came as if by magic that the others also went to the woods.

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And Bragewalt the singer was always there in happy forest solitude.

Also today it went in such a way. Under the young oak green sat the queen with Gisalhild and the maidens, all around lay or stood the king with his guests and men, listening to the songs of the singer. It was a lovely place on the slope of the Pohlsberg. Through the trunks shimmered the Amber Road, in the back rose in gentle slope the high holy Pohlshaag, which gave a sweeping view of Stilifrida. From the forest, muffled by greater distance, resounding axe blows and crashing logs sounded.

Bragewalt had finished a song; the harping had died away.

Then suddenly a blush of anger flashed across Gisalhild's face; grimly she clenched her fists and stared down through the bushes. In the sudden surge of her feelings her bosom heaved stormily and her breath flew with a gasp.

Frau Gotelind had perceived this change in Gisalhild's mind; startled, she asked her daughter, "What abominable thing touches thee, my child?"

Hagestald, lying near in the grass, sprang hastily to his feet, stood before the queen with his sword drawn, and cried, "Blitz and blue fire, Madam Queen! Has a bear or a boar frightened thee? Yours is Suntarolt's sword; it is sharp!"

The king with the others had also come to see what was there.

"There you can see them, the villains who robbed me!" cried Gisalhild, her voice trembling with excitement. "And there, that goat-bearded monster, that is the Jew Mordechai, who sold me as a slave! From that very spot the villain has carried me off!"

On the road below, men became visible, leading heavily loaded pack animals; armed men formed the escort. It was an amber caravan heading for Carnuntum's forum.

As if enraged, the king tore up his horn so that the hanging chain clanged, and a threatening call of thunder resounded from the Wiesent's coiled forehead.

Then it came alive in the wood. Armored men burst out from all sides and gathered around the king, both on horseback and on foot. In a short time, the king and his men, together with their wives, were mounted.

Randmar, with some of his men, directed the freight train to stop. Then he called to them with these words: "You Roman merchants and countrymen, hear the king's word! You may go unhindered if you pay the duty. But Gambin the king demands repentance for the robbery of his child. Hand him over, the Jew Mordecai, and you may go. If you do not give him, then we will take him, but then you will not be let in peace."

Then pale horror seized the old trafficker; he knew himself lost. Howling and wailing, he threw himself at the feet of his companions, smashed his face, tore his robe, and shredded his naked chest with his fingernails. Confused, the merchants, their escorts and the slaves of the merchandise train stood around, perplexed, unable to make a decision.

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For a long time Randmar let him stand there, motionless on his horse in front of the group.

The Marshal kept it that way because he had remembered Swan's warning that the greatest virtue of a man's territory in a raging battle is measured calm; for this plain superiority intimidates the enemy and inspires confidence in his friend. Now the Marshal thought he had sufficiently asserted his dignity, so he struck his shield with the flat of his blade so that it roared, and called out with a rough sound in his voice:

"What do you say? The German king gives you peace instead of letting you dangle on these trees to the glory of Wuotan! He does not honor your property, nor Mordechai's, you may share that; he honors only himself. There is still time to give him up. If you do not do it soon, I will throw you down and you will never stand up!"

No answer was heard but the Jew's howl of fear. Then Randmar's steed reared up so that his weapons rattled. Now the marshal shouted for the third time:

"My steed grows impatient and thirsty is my sword for some red drink. Make it short or we will treat you as enemies and disturbers of the peace!"

The Marshal's eye rolled threateningly; once again the steed reared, the weapon rattled terribly.

But already his own companions had attacked the howling and raging Mordecai, thrown him down and tied his hands behind his back. Then they forced the frenzied man to stand up. He behaved like a madman and uttered a flood of curses against all of them. But he had to submit, and some of the king's men dragged him away.

The road was already clear and the train was ready to move on, when a new noise arose.

A woman had escaped from her guards with the strength of desperation and had fallen into the dust in front of Randmar in search of help.

She, too, had been kidnapped. Now the train of goods was searched thoroughly, and two girls and a boy were found who had met the same fate.

Grimly, Suntarolt and Randmar demanded that the king take the merchants prisoner, for this newly discovered outrage demanded atonement. But the king commanded silence and the preservation of his vowed peace. So the merchants were allowed to continue on their way. The Romans did so and seemed to be in a hurry to make up for their neglect. Soon they were gone. King Gambin took the kidnapped under his protection and handed them over to his Marshal for temporary care.

But the stay in the forest was displeasing to all. They rode home. The city was entered through the Horses' Gate.

The hammering and droning of the carpenters could be heard from afar, as well as the welding and riveting of the blacksmiths. When the royal procession appeared on the market square, the noise died down, for the

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marching lord had called for silence.

Curious people filled the square. Then the Marshal showed the captured Mordecai to the people, and said, "This is the villain who stole our king's child; he will die as a Wuotan sacrifice for a father's revenge."

Then a howl of rage went through the people, stones flew at the bound man, and loud shouts of praise rewarded Randmar's word.

The marching lord was about to continue the procession, when a new event interfered.

The Quarx Haso had rushed with the rest to see what was there. That's when he saw Mordecai. The pallor of death flashed over Haso's face, the deep-set black eyes emerged from their sockets and glowed with eerie fire. With rigid horror Haso had recognized his father Mordecai.

From the immense hatred that lay in the son's gaze, it was evident how powerfully filial love might once have spoken from those same eyes. For love never ends; it can only change into antagonism.

Fearfully, under Haso's gray brows, glowing eyes rolled, a convulsive trembling seized his bent figure. Suddenly he hastily picked up a massive metal axe from the ground and stood before Mordecai with a cat's leap. Then he swung the axe over his father's head and shouted in a voice full of wrath:

"Mordecai, Mordecai! You Judas' disgrace, you Leviathan! - Die by the hand of your son, whom thy avarice cheated of happiness, of youth, of life!"

The old Jew was rigid with terror. Fear and horror reflected the eye fixed fixed on his son. He was broken. Trembling like a condemned man, he awaited the death blow.

But then Haso flung the axe far from him and cried out in terrible agitation: "No, Enoch never gives death to his father; Enoch does not do this favor to Judah's ejection! Live, live as long as Methuselah, live, but pursued by the son's curse, pursued by the curse of the tribe of Judah! - Prized to the wrathful El Shadday, enslaved to the vengeful Jehovah, the curse clings to your erring heel! Be tormented by remorse, torn by anguish of conscience; be tormented by longing for death and tortured by indomitable fear of death! Too cowardly to give thyself death, die hourly to live nevertheless!" - Gasping, he paused, glared grimly upward with clenched fists, then screeched through gritted teeth, "Thou god of wrath, El Schadday; thou god of vengeance, Jave; hear Mordechai's son's Enoch curse, for his is vengeance from everlasting to everlasting!"

Trembling, unable to speak a word, the old trafficker stood before his son with his eyes lowered, as before a guilty judge. The latter, however, stared absent-mindedly, glassy-eyed into the blue sky.

All the bystanders looked in horror and shyness at the Quarx, whom they had thought to be as mute as the others, for no one had yet heard any of them say a word.

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But the freeman Strangolf had hastily seized the chain with the neck irons and closed the eleven quarxes to it, whereupon he led them to Haso, who was standing as if petrified, and closed him to it as well.

He did not move and indifferently let everything pass over him. Thus bound to the chain, the freeman led the twelve to the nearby town pond. There, the millers and the priests ⁽³⁾ were already waiting with the ladder, for Donar's sacrificers had the honor of holding the ladder for the one who was sacrificed to Wuotan.

Soon Haso was hanging from the oak. Somberly, but uncomplainingly, the eleven other quarxes sat and lay under the oak, for they were chained to their dead comrade. ⁽⁴⁾

Deeply shaken, Gambin and Mrs. Gotelind, like the entourage of both, followed the cruel incident. Now they saw how his own pain, the self-feeling misfortune crushed the stone heart of the old slave trader. Out of greed for gold, he had not only engaged in human trafficking in the form that the law allowed, but had also circumvented it by stealing boys and girls to sell them. What did he care about age, people, status or fate of the unfortunate, only if the gold treasure in his chest increased. So he had also sacrificed his son for the love of his treasured gold. But now, when the punishment overtook him, now worry seized him about the only thing in his life, his treasure. Something came over him that looked like remorse, but it was only the expression of his bad conscience and the self-tormenting reproach of not having avoided the present danger more cleverly. Foreboding fear of certain punishment, however, made him despondent and lament his fear aloud, for he hoped for pity. Therefore he let his tears run free, while he howled the words: "Woe, woe on my head! Enoch, my son, my only one! You, the apple of my eye, you now dwell with

(3) Pfister = baker. In former times it was considered an honor for the millers and bakers, as sacrificers of the peasant god Donar, to be so to speak ministrant at the sacrifices of the aristocratic Wuotan. In the Middle Ages, where the old pagan customs were retained but outlawed, the old honor turned into opprobrium. So also the miller was ostracized as "flour thief", dishonest, and to the scold he had to hold the ladder on which the maleficant climbed up to the gallows.

(4) Erchantaug's quarxes were his serfs, namely his captured enemies, whom he could have killed. He had not given them life, but only postponed the killing. The right and defencelessness of the peasantry arose from this legal view. The peasants were unfree, prisoners of war, whom the victor had left alive. As the nobility inherited the rights of the lords, so the peasants inherited the lack of rights from generation to generation, until in the middle of the nineteenth century the peasant finally gained complete freedom. Thus also the Quarx Haso had been captured as an enemy of Erchantaug by the latter, and Erchantaug had reserved the right to kill him. So it was not because he spoke that he was hanged, but the deferred killing, which could have been accomplished at any moment without special cause, was accomplished by the broken condition. -

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Abraham and the arch-fathers! God of my fathers, turn away Your wrath from me poor stricken man, look upon my wretched torn heart! Woe upon my head! Woe to me blinded! My Enoch, my son! If I had forgiven you your love for Rachel, the daughter of the beggar Aaron! If only I had allowed you to ask for what you asked for on your knees! Enoch, my son! How good your will was, how good it would have been, if I had wanted it so. Woe is me! Enoch, my son, take your curse from me, for now you are with Rachel, your wife, you are united with her in Abraham's bosom! Help me beg, Rachel, help me beg my son Enoch, for now you are with him. Rachel, I tore you from Enoch's side, I sold you as a slave for the arena, I gave you away to the lion to eat, because you were poor! But now you are happy with your Enoch in Abraham's bosom! Now you don't have to sleep anymore, my son, as a Greek philosopher under the arcades of the arena, where Rachel found death, because you are with her! Woe upon my unhappy head! Woe, woe! I offered you, my Enoch, half of the gold I got for Rachel; you fled! I offered you two-thirds, you fled! I offered you the whole, double and triple, - you fled! - Alas! - You flee me, me, your father! Alas! You became a renegade, I had lost my son! Woe -!"

Tears beaded in Frau Gotelinden's eyes, a silent plea seemed to be reflected in them; Gisalhild was also moved. The king's chest heaved heavily, irresolutely he bent down on wife and child. Who knows what would have happened if Hagestalde had not suddenly shouted angrily: "Blitz and blue fire, king! You shall never let yourself be wheedled by such a viper's tongue! He has stolen your child, remember that! - Do you think that remorse is his howl? It is fear, pain for lost property, fear of agonizing death, that it is, but not remorse! Suntarolt warns you, Lord King! Do not dare to worry the god of the highways about his sacrifice, fear the disfavor of the celestials! Also he has insulted thine daughter, Austrorand's bride, and struck her with a slave's whip! - Now exercise mercy, lord and king!"

A blush of anger shone from the king's countenance; Frau Gotelinden's tears had also dried up.

King Gambin beckoned to Strangolf, the Gothi of Stilifrída, and said to him, "There stands the highwayman Mordecai, the peace-breaker of the roads. He has offended against the most holy Heimdall⁽⁵⁾, the lord of the highways on earth as in heaven; now let him be consecrated to Heimdall as an atoning sacrifice. Do with him as custom and statute demand!"

Mordecai was furious when the freeman seized him. But he did not understand any joke; the servants seized the unruly man and drove him before them with punches and blows to the ribs. Soon he was removed from the

Heimdold, Heimdallr; the guardian of the castle of the gods, the bridge of the gods (Bifröst, Beberast, Rainbow) and lord of the streets of heaven and earth.

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marketplace.

The king and his men also went to the castle.

Several days had passed since then.

The army was ready. Gambin's men were well trained and thus the Swan's mission was fulfilled.

Aistmuth had taken leave from the royal court and left Stilifrida. The people, however, were even more timid in avoiding him on his ride than they had been in avoiding his path when he entered. With horror they perceived that on the seventh neck ring of the chain only Haso's clothes were hanging.

The number thirteen had been uncanny to them, and really now only twelve went away. But Strangolf had taken the dead Haso from the tree and buried him at its foot with his face turned downward.

Silently they rode out of the outer castle gate, and behind the soldiers threw the bolts into the lock.

Then Aistmuth saw a terrible mark in front of him on the road. A high pole was erected at the edge of the road, in the middle of which a wagon wheel was stuck horizontally like the mast basket of a liburne; at the top, however, was a quarter of the sacrificed Mordechai. Three more such painted poles staked the roads outside Stilifrida's keep.

Mordecai had expiated his guilt by sacrificial death, he had not been "executed". The death penalty, as it is known in Roman law, as we still know it today, was just as foreign to the Germanic peoples in pre-Christian times as so many other blessings of Roman law, with which Rome made the German peoples "fortunate" after the introduction of Christianity.

The guilty person was sacrificed at first by the head of the family, later by the elder of the tribe, and still later by the king or the god's priest against whose majesty he had transgressed. His death was meant as a sacrifice of atonement, to satisfy the offended divine right, to divert divine punishment from the innocent tribesmen.

Noiselessly the ship of the Swan glided through the clear tide of the Marahabia, past sunlit floodplain forest splendor, past eagle's nests like the sand nests of the seagulls.

Leaning against his steed, Aistmuth stood on the stern, his eyes turned to where Carnuntum stretched out, hidden from his view.

In a waking dream, however, the Swan warrior thought he saw a high tower with crenellated fronts growing out of the stone, the stone in whose bosom, like the farmer's winter seed, Erchantaug's castle lay in slumber.

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Chapter Eighteen

King Gambin's Death

When a thunderstorm is approaching, it becomes sultry. The sun broods scorchingly over the thirsty earth, no breeze brings coolness, and hulking masses of clouds tower up threateningly as a sign of approaching storms.

Similar sultriness weighed down on the Hibernum Castrum at Carnuntum today. The bodyguards of the Proconsul had manned the portico with double posts, and numerous guards stood in all corners of the palace, as if they feared an attack. The Proconsul himself was hidden in his chambers, but it was said that he was away on government business. An eerie silence shadowed the expressions of everyone who belonged to the government palace.

As in the Hibernum Castrum, so it was in the Castle. The legion was kept in readiness in the barracks and each gate was manned by half a cohort. Also the gates of the civilian quarter had been closed and provided with strong crews. The streets, however, were traversed by whole maniples of legionnaires as patrol columns.

If this display of weapons had not been of festive appearance, one would have thought that an enemy was approaching. But it was not so. Powerful guests were expected, to whom one wanted to show off the military strength of the Marcus-aurelian colony under the appearance of honor.

The king of the Alemanni, Makrian, had taken it upon himself to disturb the Roman forts on the Rhine in order to keep Valentinian busy there and divert his attention from the Danube. This intention had succeeded, because the emperor had rushed to the Rhine with a strong army. Marcellianus did not let himself be distracted by this; he calmly continued to build on the Danube the new forts on the left bank.

In Stilifrida, meanwhile, the weather cloud of the German army was gathering. Gambin therefore felt strong enough to break off the deliberately delaying negotiations by making certain demands.

He demanded immediate cessation of construction and evacuation of the

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land, otherwise he would avenge the breach of the peace. The demand was ostensibly complied with; the continuation of the ban was interrupted and Marcellianus withdrew to Carnuntum. However, he had left strong garrisons in the camps near the castle buildings. At the renewed request of the German king, the message came from Carnuntum that Rome was inclined to have the castellated buildings levelled with the ground and to conclude a state treaty with Gambin for the purpose of a confederation. For this purpose Gambin was invited to a banquet in Carnuntum to confirm his friendly attitude.

So Gambin, the German king, rode into Carnuntum today in his twelfth year. It was a magnificent crowd.

Gambin was received at the bridgehead with the honors due to a powerful federal king. A herald of the Proconsul had waited for him there with a handsome retinue of slaves and a larger detachment of the Proconsul's bodyguard. After many useless words had been spoken, the procession began to move: first a detachment of the bodyguard, then the herald, then the king's band of twelve. Each horse was led by two slaves on the reins. The end of the procession was again a detachment of the bodyguard.

Thus they entered Carnuntum.

Onlookers gathered in the streets to see the dreaded king of the Quads, but everything remained calm. No cry of imprecation, nor any of greeting were raised, sultry silence brooded over the crowd.

"By the Wurfger (spear thrower) and all the wishful things of Wuotan!" broke Suntarolt, who rode beside the king, the silence. "This will ill please the old Roman hater! It would be wiser to sit in Stilifrida, as Suntarolt advised you. They brew badly malted beer!"

"I agree," replied the king, "but the sacred right of hospitality protects us from betrayal! They know my strength, and that is why they are inclined to peace. Faith, they seek me for a friend, to seize Makrian, the Alemanni, in the back. That's it."

Then the old man cast a wild glance over the crowd, and answered, "By the Balmung Wuotans, which thou bearest on thy left hand! Suntarolt knows not what fear is. My fencing iron rusts thirsty for the blood drink of iron! But do not despise the advice: do not untie the helmet, do not unbuckle the sword! The Hagestalden is about to pass through the ringed towering gate!"

"Old friend, you're dreaming!" replied Gambin, laughing. "Before it comes to sharpening our swords on Roman bridges, many a rag will be ground on them by our squires!"

Suntarolt laughed wildly, but replied nothing; yet his steed reared and gnashed foamily into the curb.

In front of the porticus of the Hibernum Castrum they jumped out of the saddles. Then the herald demanded that they take the first step into the emperor's house with their right foot.

Suntarolt raised his fist. But the king put his hand on his shoulder, and the

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Hagestalde lowered his clenched fist again with a grim look. They strode up the marble stairs. The herald led them to Marcellianus' triclinium. At the entrance stood a slave, who received the guests with the words: "You, who want to pass through this gate, put your right foot on the threshold of the guest room! so it will be -" This was as far as he could go.

"By the spraying sword!" cried the old man, giving the slave a good kick. "There stands the German king, and any foot he kicks you with is the right one for you! But because Suntarolt is not the king, he gave you the demanded kick with the right foot."

The king stifled his laughter with an effort, but again he put his hand on the old man's armpit. The slave, however, limped away howling.

The incident had attracted Marcellianus. With haughty pride he strode towards the king, offered him his hand and spoke the greeting: "Marcellianus, the Dux Valeriae greets the Quadian king! Happy is he to receive him as his friend! Let it be well with thee under the roof of Caesar, under the protection of the mighty Lares of the house and the gods of the host!"

To this Gambin had replied, striking into the proffered right hand, "Gambin, the German king greets thee also, Dux Valeriae! But where is your father, the Proconsul? To greet the King of the German kings is the business of Caesar or his deputy, so lead me to one of the two!"

Marcellianus cast a scornful glance at Gambin, but immediately narrowed his eyes and replied with feigned astonishment, "Sublime chief king of the Germans and royal friend of Caesar Valentinian! How this will please my father when he learns how much the power of the one who will soon be a confederate of the Roman Caesar has increased. But an unexpected message arrived from the emperor, summoning the Proconsul immediately to Illyria. Therefore, may it be convenient for you to negotiate with the Dux Valeriae and to bind the alliance with oaths."

"Let it be!" said the king. "But notice, Dux Valeriae, in the future the King of the Germans demands from the Emperor of the Romans the honor due to him! Even to the king of the Quads this honor befits, for more than four centuries Rome has not been able to force the Quads; but to the united Germans this honor is even more due! I cannot become your confederate as long as you are fighting in Alemania, for Alemania belongs to the German crown just as Etruria belongs to Rome. But I want to negotiate with you and help to promote peace, and also to invoke it, so let me hear what you are willing to say."

"You are wisely advised, high king!" said Marcellianus with grinning friendliness. At this he pointed to the laid table and continued, "But too long have you stood in the gate. Take a seat and refresh yourselves, for when the body is refreshed, only then will the spirit be capable of wise counsel. I would gladly ask you to disarm, but I was advised that you go to bed yourself in the adornment of weapons. So do as you please. Here you are under the umbrella

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of the right of hospitality, and that is sacred and inviolable to the Roman. Even if you should part as Rome's most terrible enemies, even then you would leave Carnuntum's gates unharmed. No Roman would dare to avenge even the most death-worthy outrage against you within the walls of Carnuntum. Sacred and inviolable to us is the guest!"

Then a wild laugh resounded from Suntarolt's breast, and booming, he struck the shield with a massive fist blow, so that his weapon clanged and rattled. Marcellianus pretended not to be aware of it.

The table began; twelve Teutons, twelve Romans had seated themselves around it in the dining beds. A gaggle of charming slave girls wound rose threads around the temples of the table companions and scattered rose petals over them.

In front of Marcellianus, a slave had placed a silver skeleton on the table. It was artificially made and movable in the joints. Dallying, the Dux Valeria made it stand up and spoke with comedic seriousness: "Table companions! Have we counted the years that the age of mankind has reached until today? Are we able to determine the years that will pass until the last man has gone to Hades? What an inconspicuously small number of years is allotted to each one of us! Therefore let us enjoy life before we become like this!" Quickly the slave removed the silver skeleton. With a loud evocative the goblets bumped against each other.

The feast was a cheerful one. The Germans gave a brilliant demonstration of their drinking skills, but had found worthy opponents in the Romans.

With the floods of wine, the negotiations flowed almost unrestrainedly, and Gambin found no serious objections from the Dux Valeriae to fight. Suntarolt was silent. His word of warning had been disregarded, but he had not been able to shake off his suspicions. Therefore he kept silent like one who knows that the future will prove him right.

Marcellianus had granted everything; the demolition of the castles, the withdrawal of the troops, yes, he would even have promised the demolition of the Capitol at Rome if Gambin had demanded it.

Thus the treaty was sworn by Marcellianus in the name of Caesar Valentinian and by King Gambin, confirmed on both sides by eleven oath-takers.

Gambin was highly satisfied. He had achieved what he had hardly hoped for: unconditional peace. Now he could move to the Rhine to help the Alemanni, since the Danube was secured. Everyone was happy, only the Hagestalde was resentful.

The table was lifted. The twelve warriors mounted their steeds and rode home. With the same entourage, the same pompous honor as at the entry, King Gambin's ride was honored. Silent, shy groups of curious people again passed through Gambin and his soldiers. The outer Porta Praetoria was ridden

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through, its portcullis rattled down. In front of the riders the wide mirror of the river shone, above it in the reddish ray of the sinking sun the arches of Trajan's bridge. The procession moved close to the battlement wall. Suddenly the advancing guards made a turn and advanced on Gambin with their deadly javelins. Quickly the king drew his sword, but at the same moment the dagger of the slave who was leading his steed was driven into his chest under his right arm. Silently and without even a stroke of his sword, Gambin sank dead into the dust.

Now a terrible tumult began. Suntarolt raged like a berserker among the Romans, as did Randmar and Sintold. The three had quickly pressed together and surrounded the dead king. The other eight also joined in a circle and slaughtered among the Romans, who were pressing in on them from all sides. Thrown projectiles, arrows and spears hailed down on the Germans from the battlements, but they piled a wall of corpses around them for the fury of bitterness had made their blows massive. The ranks of the enemy were gradually thinning out, but some of the betrayed guests had also been buried in the dust. Only four of them were still sitting in the saddles. The ranks of the murderers closed more tightly around the hard-pressed Teutons. They knew well that they were doomed to die, but precisely because they knew this, they fought with wild fury that nothing could withstand. The sword strokes on helmets and shields boomed terribly, the curses of the fighters sounded ghastly, interrupted by the rattling of the fallen and the moaning of the dying.

Then the call of the bugle resounded; a cloud of dust hurriedly billowing up heralded the approach of help.

The Romans wavered, they lowered their weapons in terror, for they had recognized the sight of Erchantaug's twelve riders. But Suntarolt with Randmar, Sintold and Astold did not let their swords rest. With tenfold fury they cut at the Romans, who, unable to resist, received death wounds without even a shield. Now Erchantaug had reached the battlefield. Twelve still bloodless swords continued the slaughter, greedily drinking the blood. Soon the last of the murderers lay withered on the ground. Down from the battlements rattled the throwing stuff, but none of the Quades, and none of Erchantaug's band of twelve took any damage. Then the Porta Praetoria's portcullis slowly rose. In blind rage, the Hagestalde turned his steed to blast into the gate. But Erchantaug resisted. With the voice of the battle-warden he thundered to the bold one: "Stop, Wuotansman, back!" The Hagestalde obeyed. But even to him, whom he thought to be Wuotan, he could not conceal his defiance; therefore he was angry:

"Suntarolt obeys the battle rider by his ger, his mantle, and his sword! But grant us victory; with Thee we are enough to shatter the nest of shame, with Thou Wuotan, the father of victory!"

But calmly with dignity Erchantaug replied, "Keep thy word! It is not yet time! Hold thy angry tongue, thou devotee of Wuotan! Ride swiftly to the

castle of salvation; kindle with pine and magic a flaming fire of Kraiang, then return with the army of the Germans, and Carnuntum is yours. Lead home to his Hall the dead Teutonic lord of the throne, but bring him with you to the storm on Carnuntum! Still in death the mighty lord of men will lead the battle-joyful multitudes in this last ride of revenge on the nefarious Rome!"

The Porta Praetoria's portcullis was still open, but no breach was made. Erchantaug had guessed the right thing to do. If the Teutons had rushed through the open portcullis, as Suntarolt wanted, it would have closed behind the last one, and the intruders would have been trapped. The reason for this was that behind the portcullis stretched the kennel, from which a gate closed with mighty oak wings led into the city. With terrible bad luck they would have been destroyed in this kennel.

The Hagestalde did not know this; he was still waiting for a failure. Therefore he raged with thundering words up to the battlements: "Come out, you cowardly guest murderers, come out! Suntarolt has a good sword; by the Flamebeard of the Victory-Father he wants to give it to you, but you have to fetch it!"

Then Erchantaug laid his right hand on Suntarolt's shoulder, and said benignly: "Wrath adorns the fearless chastiser of shameless wretches; Walhalla's Champion praises the doorman with shining eyes; but Herian's Hagestalde shines in a more proud splendor, when he considers the words of Wuotan! Return home with the noble king, and proclaim to the bold this bestial act, draw the wrath with igniting curses, unleash the rage to the terrible torch and then hurl it into the villains' shameful nest! Let not a stone stand on another stone, let not a pillar rise from its pedestal, let not a gable shine, let not a tower turn, let not a life live in this criminals' disgusting nest! Return home to the noble hall, thou chosen one of the Champion, who saved thee from Agez' towering Aggstone with his noble Eagle!"

These words at once disarmed and inflamed Suntarolt. The old man's chest heaved violently; with wide-open eyes he stared at the speaker, and then cried out in supreme enthusiasm, "By the eternal God, the dark, the incomprehensible! Yes, it is you yourself, many-glorious Wuotan! Hail Herian, to Thee! Let this old Roman hater still accomplish this work, then let him pass through the ringed gate of diamond! Grant him the one glorious deed, and then free thy man from the burden of rotting limbs, spare him from a prideless death on the straw!"

With the strength of a youth, Hagestalde swung himself out of the saddle, threw himself on his knee before Erchantaug and kissed his foot. Erchantaug touched the kneeling man's head with his bare sword and said: "Your wish is granted! Thou shalt smash the defiant gates and towers of the punishable city; and when the castle fire burns, then adorn the steaming battlefield as the last of the dead! Four lee mountains will be piled up like a ford in front of the

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judged city; one of them shall be yours, as a glass castle for times to come! With proud stately followers you ride in to the most noble hall of the heroes, so that the heel does not see the falling gate, before you enter the blessed hall! Announce also to Gisa: The noble Austrorand's bride, wrapped in glorious robes, will guide the dead throne-lord's army and ride as a guard for the sleeping hero in his funeral cloth! Eleven of the battle maidens will join her on the day of departure for the revenge ride to Carnuntum. Tell her, my hero: Of the four castle fires she has to light two with her own hand, that of my hero Gambin, and that of my hero Suntarolt! Take this jewel as a symbol; give it to Frau Gotelind, she will then believe the tidings! Tell the good woman, it is Austrorand's most blessed treasure!"

Suntarolt carefully hid the jewel, then jumped up and, swinging his sword high, he cheered: "Thanks, Herian, to you! Your word be kept! Carnuntum and Rome, you both shall long remember the last battle of the old Roman spoiler!"

With Erchantaug's followers, Randmar, Astold and Sintold had rounded up the shy steeds of the fallen. Now on each of them was placed his dead rider. Adorned with arms and weapons, sitting upright, the dead were tied to the saddles for a safe ride home. Each of the four guarded two dead riders, between whom he rode, leading their steeds by hand.

Thus began the ride of the dead. Suntarolt led the dead king on the right and his armorer Sintram on the left, the others followed in the same way.

They rode straight into the stream, swimming to reach the river's shore. Erchantaug with his host kept in marble silence as a protective guard of the riders, until their last, carried by the current, had disappeared behind the arch of Trajan's bridge.

Then Erchantaug turned his steed and rode in wild chase with his following band of twelve around Carnuntum to reach the sunken castle through the cave in the stone.

But the dead king rode home to Stilifrida.

Heavy clouds flew swiftly over the moaning floodplain forest, through which a storm drove with a howling lament. It was as if Bragi himself had taken up the strings of his harp to lament for the murdered king. The half-veiled moon gloomily flashed through the lead-gray clouds. They were eerily clumsy measures, grimacing, resembling a procession of ghostly horsemen. Then the illusionary figures disappeared again, towering like the giants building castles. The land lay in dark shadows. There Stilifrida stood out from the night sky, unclear in the silhouette.

With the steep falls of the castle mountain in sight, Suntarolt moderated the trot of the horses; slowly the dead rode through the field.

Leaning on his ger, Kadolz stood on the rampart and sank his eye into the play of the clouds in the changing moonlight. Then he saw the train. Slowly, hesitantly, it dragged itself across the plain. The gatekeeper recognized the Hagestalden. How was it that the old man rode where the king should have

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ridden on his own? How come they rode in threes? How was it that the king was not at the head of the procession?! Did the strong wines of Caesar do that to the dear lord? Did he fall asleep from fatigue? It had to be so, otherwise his army would cheerfully announce the return home! And yet! Why do the horses drag themselves so sadly, which otherwise greeted the stables with joyful neighing after the most tiring ride, which otherwise hurried towards home in joyful chase! How strangely and sadly they crept along today, as if horse and man were asleep, as if it were a train of corpses moved with illusory life, a train of the dead! - Dead!? - Yes, by the most holy Tyr! - They are really dead! Dead the king! - Dead, dead!

With this cry of terror, the gatekeeper hurried down the kennel to the outer castle gate. Dead the king, dead the dear lord!

Then, from the tower of the Hechsa, the eerie thundering of the ancient basin resounded; from the bowels of the earth, muffled cries of woe whimpered. Dead the king, dead the dear lord!

With flying robes the Queen and Gisalhild with their women came hurrying to Kadolz and saw the ride of the dead with a stare of horror.

But away roared the ancient basin, cries of woe shook the air. Dead the king, dead the dear lord! The bolts of the city gate rumbled back, the heavy gate's wings turned creakily; then the dead rode in.

Wailing, wife and daughter staggered beside the riding corpse of the dead lord of the throne. With bowed head, as if he was aware of the pain he brought, the king's gray stallion strode ponderously along. Thus the dead man made his entrance.

The dead lord of men was placed in the high seat of the hall, the seven fallen heroes next to him in the pews. His wife and daughter, sobbing, knelt at the feet of the corpse of Gambin, to whom the royal ornaments had been put on, and buried their tearful faces in the bosom of the dearly departed.

The four returned warriors, covered with blood and dust, with their shattered shields, their battered helmets in front of the eight fallen, they waited for Mrs. Gotelinden to address them, honoring their overwhelming pain.

In the face of the dead, the survivors had to justify themselves against the accusation of cowardice and disloyalty. It was considered a disgrace to outlive one's shield lord. Only special circumstances were able to turn the curse.

Behind the four of them, however, the people rushed in to the hall, but they avoided touching them, for they did not yet know whether vindication was possible for them; they did not yet know whether they would curse them as outlaws, outcasts, or pay homage to them as celebrated heroes. Thus a wide empty space remained free around them.

Deep silence lay over the hall, shaken only by the sobs of the women. Adaluna's eyes wandered to Randmar in search of help, for she did not yet know whether Randmar's return meant a blessing or a curse. His look told her nothing, for it was sad and hung rigidly on the king's lifeless countenance.

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That offended her. Was there only the dead lord of the throne in the chamber for the marshal and not also Randmar's bride?

The frightening silence of silent mourning might have lasted for a long time, if Hagestalden had not lost his patience. He remembered Erchantaug's message; he also burned with eagerness to see the fires of Kraiän blaze. But how could he approach the sacred flame, as long as the honor of his shield was not certified?

Therefore, he heavily thrust his sword on the ground and made a powerful fist strike on his shield. Then he grabbed the jewel that Erchantaug had given him and strode towards the queen, handing it to her. Then he said: "By all three wells of the sacred ash tree! Queen, stop weeping; indeed, even Suntarolt's eyes are wet and the old man is little ashamed of it! But listen to Erchantaug's message, from none other than Wuotan himself! Hear his admonition, see his wisdom! But now stop crying! Otherwise the good king will ride deaf and weary with dripping whiskers to the Hall of the Blessed! Grant the mourning heroes our vindication speech, be the royal Queen again, forget being a woman!"

Then the queen slowly lifted her head from the dead king's lap. The blinding light must have caused her eyes pain, because a tear-heavy cloth was pressed in front of them. But she gathered all her courage and said in a calm, softly trembling voice: "Speak, my Hagestalde, who once called yourself the one obliged to me. Speak, but know that you and the others do not need the vindication speech. You brought the dead, the weapons, the horses, you brought battered helmets, shattered shields, cracked breasts and gaping wounds! Even the wounds of the dead are closed, not a drop of blood gushes out of them. ⁽¹⁾ You remain the victors, your appearance testifies to that. Your sword, which you consecrated to me, has taken many a good bite. I thank you. But tell me Erchantaug's words of admonition!"

Now Frau Gotelind slowly lowered the cloth from her eyes and glanced at Erchantaug's "words of wisdom". A tremor seized her as she looked at it more closely. "Yes, this is a wisdom and the one who sent it is a god!" cried the Queen, hardly able to take her eyes off it and fight back the tears. Then, as if talking to herself, she continued: "Gisa's necklace of red coral! Once Gambin gave it to me. Then I gave it to Gisa, and then it was stolen from me along with my child! How long I missed it with silent sorrow!"

Frau Gotelind now sat down in the high seat next to her dead husband and wrapped her arm around his cold body; she leaned her tired head against his

(1) It was believed that the wounds of the slain began to bleed anew when the murderer or the person responsible for the death was placed in front of the corpse. Thus Siegfried's wound bled when Hagen stepped in front of his corpse.

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shoulder. Thus she spoke, "Now speak, my Suntarolt, we hear and believe!"

The vibrating roar of the earthen cauldron penetrated from the pike tower into the hall, also roaring tumult from the excited people, which flooded Stilifrida in the wildly roaring tumult.

Suntarolt began: "Queen! By all the Aesir, elves and more! The sun never saw more disgraceful brutes! The sacred right of hospitality was maliciously insulted; Gambin was murdered! Hear it Queen, hear it you Quades, hear it you Germans! Your king was murdered cowardly, because one Roman was too timid to battle his sword! He died without knowing what happened to him; so well did the steel strike!"

Then Hagestalde reported what had happened: how they had taken revenge on the villains, how Erchantaug had rushed up like a whirlwind, what he had done and what message for the Queen and Gisalhild he had entrusted to Suntarolt.

Then Gisalhild jumped up and hurried to Frau Gotelind. The deep pain that had bowed her had given way to mild grief, united with royal pride. Gently she drew her mother's hand with the cloth from her eyes, kissed her and said: "Mother and queen! Erchantaug's salvation advice, made known to us by Suntarolt, is wise and good. Keep the advice; master your tears! Otherwise the dead father would have to complete the ride to Valhalla, drenched by the ripe cold blood dew! ⁽²⁾ Take care for revenge; kindle the fires of Kraiän; deliver Strangolf to the front! Then I will help you to pay the last allegiance to the dead father, before Austrorand's armor envelops my body."

Then Frau Gotelind groaned in pain and cried lamentingly: "My child, my child! Too much pain at once, you terrible gods! Now I shall lose you too! Shall I let you go to the bloody battle? No, this must never happen!" Anew a stream

(2) It was believed that the tears of the bereaved fell as cold drops of blood on the head and chest of the dead: Edda, Helgakvidha Hundingsbana:

Siegrun:

How damp is thy hair, Helge, from ripening,
How completely in front blood doused your body,
How ice-cold the hands of the oath of Hagen!
How do I, my lord, atone for this?

Helge, (the dead):

It is your work, Siegrun, from the Wonneberg,
That Helge is so completely doused with blood.
Cruel tears, thou golden, sunny one
Beautiful, you mean before going to sleep:
Bloody each fell on the king's breast,
The cold and painful in the grave

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of tears burst from the queen's eyes, and lamenting she sank to the murdered husband's breast.

"Mother, my good mother!" cried Gisalhild with hands torn in pain, "conquer the harm, thou art queen! The God who calls me is powerful enough to protect me! Go with me to Carnuntum with your maids, escort the good father to the shield castle, and then live with me, your child! But now be strong, as is the Queen's duty!"

She sank to the chest of the pain-stricken woman, but she could not separate herself from the body of the dead king. The tears flowed unstoppably.

Adaluna had come to Randmar. There, with a sorrowful heart, she had noticed how the blood flowed out through the gaping cracks in his armor and how he, weak and mortally wounded, offered defiance to the dwindling of his strength. Weeping and wringing her hands, she fell at the feet of the queen and, clasping her knees, cried: "Good, dear queen! Dead is the king, dead is the dear lord! He sits in the high seat of the fathers! You are king now! Care for his faithful ones, for the pillars of your future! There they stand, bleeding to death, languishing! With heroic sacrifices they honor your pain, therefore honor heroic sacrifices you also their wounds; keep for you and us the good heroes and their faithful swords! Queen, hear my wailing plea for the virtuous sword-wielders!"

With difficulty, supported by Gisalhild, the queen rose, kissed Adaluna, anxious for Randmar, on the forehead with a dull smile, and, bravely conquering her grief, spoke:

"Pardon, you good knights, the weak heart of the wife! the queen's strong heart shall make you forget all sorrow. You, who have suffered wounds, go with Adaluna! she shall take care of you. Let as many of my maidens help her as necessary. You shall receive the thanks for loyalty in abundance, after the kraiän fires have flown through the land. My good Suntarolt, are you also sore? Go with the others, hands enough are there to light the fire!"

The queen had only now noticed how the old man was bleeding from many wounds; his skins were soaked with blood. But the Hagestalde cried, "By all the sword-light shining swords of Walhalla! Such pitiful wounds the Wuotansman respects so little that he does not even know whether a Roman dog scratched him! Queen, now you please the fierce Roman hater; come, light the fire! None may help thee but thy sword-wielder, none may call to the flames of revenge but thou! Your hand, which nurtures the dead shield lord, which will show him the last loyalty, your hand is called to throw the torch to the fire that will call through all districts of the Germans! Come, thou art worthy of the sword which the Wuotansman Suntarolt consecrates to thee, come!"

Leaning on Gisalhild, the queen went behind the castle, where in a wide square the woodpile for the bonfire lay already prepared. Suntarolt walked beside the queen.

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There, the freeman had already killed the twelve sacrificial steeds and laid them on the enormous altar of fire. ⁽³⁾ The Neidstangen, i.e the revenge poles, on which the twelve steed heads stood, were planted on the Wodansbed above Lake Harug.

On the large square, which was bordered by the ramparts of the city on one side and those of the castle on the other, stood a huge pyre, two men high. It measured more than fifty man-steps square. The gaps between the tree trunks, which lay piled here, were interwoven with resin-soaked brushwood to catch fire easily and quickly.

The clouds were heavy overhead; the land lay in gloomy shadow. The people swarmed around the fireplace in a dull bustle. Then the Hagestalde with the queen and Gisa climbed up the woodpile on which the sacrificial steeds already lay; there he struck his shield with his sword so that it boomed and shouted to the assembled people: "You men and townspeople of Stilifrida, hear the word of the old sword-wielder! By the eternal, victorious Aesir!

"Four hundred years we have been fighting nefarious Rome on the banks of the Danube in manly combat. Infamy upon infamy the Roman dogs have heaped; the measure is full, and now violating the right of hospitality they have murdered our king! Look here at the queen, and remember all the king's clemency; consider how the cowards think to have murdered along with him all of the Quads, all of the Germans! Consider, you men, that they think you and I cowardly sissies, too weak, too stupid for king's speech! Consider that outrages committed can also be avenged on Rome, for the victorious Aesir are with us! Look here Gisalhild, the bride of the Sun's son Austrorand, she goes armed with you to Rome! Men of Stilifrida! Quads! Men of the German army! Germans! Speak, shall the Kraian's call of fire resound from the mountains, or will you send an embassy to Caesar Valentinian and beg him for mercy? Speak! And if you are men, if it is your will that your German queen's Kraian fire be kindled, then choose your duke for the revenge procession! Choose the Duke, until the King Austrorand appointed to you by the mighty Aesir sits under King Gambin's crown! Speak and choose who -"

The old man could say no more. A howl of rage rippled through the air; in addition, the fist-beaten shields thundered and the weapons clashed, so that the booming sound from the witches' tower was almost drowned out.

Then a densely packed crowd of people rolled up and raised the

(3) Kraian fires, the war telegraphs of that time, later known as "kreidfeuer" and common in these areas until the time after the second Turkish siege of Vienna (1683), had certain places, which are still marked on old maps and are undoubtedly ancient. The square in question here is located in the western corner of Stilifrida's ramparts, next to the castle. Excavations show that the ground was leveled and a strip of almost sixty square meters was heaped with a layer of pure, unmixed ash in the thickness of more than a meter. Powerful fires must have often blazed there, and the assumption of a kreidfeuer in this place cannot be opposed by any other assumption.

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Hagestalden on the shield; "Haiö, the Duke Suntarolt! Haiö, Haiö!" Suntarolt was crowned duke.

Two other throngs of people pressed after, to honor Frau Gotelind and Gisalhild likewise by raising shields. Then the shouts thundered through the people, "Hail to our queens, hail! Death to the Roman, death!"

The torches were brought. A new uproar and noise broke out; then it was quiet. Queen Gotelind had thrust her torch first into the brushwood that filled one of the aisles of the pyre. Gisalhild followed her. Finally, Duke Suntarolt thrust the torch into the woodpile so that the sparks flew.

Sparkling and crackling, the flames licked through the brushwood in the woodpile; soon reddish lights peeked through the logs. Clouds of smoke curled up, then the first flame burst out of the wood in a whirling whirl. Now it was bright; now the blood-red fire glowed over Stilifrida. Soon the huge wooden masts had become one great flame. The moon looked down on it in sheer amazement. Like bloody northern lights, the glowing light of the Kraiän fire lay over the towers and ramparts of the city, the forests and heights of the surrounding area. A glowing cloud, saturated with the roaring flames of the sacrificial fire, rose slowly skyward, as if the spirit of revenge were rising menacingly against the south.

The flickering glow of the reddish light surrounded the aged figure of Suntarolt, a giant, who stood leaning on the shaft of an ash tree. With grim looks the duke stared into the crackling embers, as if he could not get enough of the flame of terrible rapacity.

He thought of Balder's castle fire and shouted in wild delight: "Haiö! By the unleashed castle! Suntarolt greets you, you snakes of fire; how beautifully you twine! Angry air seizes his heart, when he sees how you ardently embrace the jaws! Haiö, soon you, too, wrap around his weary bones the billowing mantle of fire-purple; soon the smoking gray cloud will carry him, too, up to the diamond gate of the gods' court!"

The queens had returned to the hall to tend the dead king.

Duke Suntarolt, however, with the dead king's loyal band, which was now his, circumambulated the ramparts of Stilifrida, the pole-girded castle.

From all heights the fires of Kraiän blazed through the land; new ones rose again and again to announce with tongues of flame to the German people that the day of making would soon dawn. In the far periphery of the city the fire signs flamed, the country seemed to become a wide flaming dragon, prepared to devour Carnuntum, even all of Rome.

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Chapter Nineteen

The King's Speech

Great worry oppressed Carnuntum. The slaughter of the Proconsul's bodyguard by the four Teutons, the sudden appearance of the ghostly robed-god, already thought to have disappeared, had filled the Marcus-aurelian colony with terror and fear. Timid, excited crowds flooded the city; loud imprecations against Marcellianus, the Dux Valeriae, were emitted.

When vague rumors had reached the people that Marcellianus intended to make the Quads leaderless by an act of violence, it was found that the Dux Valeriae possessed talent for government, even great wisdom of state, in spite of his youth. But as soon as it was seen that the Bearskinners had made a great stand, that they had cut down the terrible superior force and had spread such terror among the legionaries that nothing was able to induce them to mass action, it was found that the Proconsul's son was a rash boy. They rushed to the battlements to watch the death of the king of the Quads as if it were in the arena, but distraught, they fled from there to the interior of the city, until the battlements were no longer seen.

Then people calmed down. Some brave ones even dared to go back to the battlements to look around. But they saw nothing. Dust clouds swirled in the air here and there. "It's the Quads!" some shouted and ran from the battlements. Others, however, shouted that it was only the storm. Gradually they became calmer and safer. Night came. Suddenly, in the northern sky, an enormous redness became visible, as if a city were on fire. Then people began to rejoice, all danger was forgotten. The friends of Marcellianus raised their heads again, his praise was proclaimed by all tongues, and those were laughed at who had advised to summon the consul Equitius from Arabona to Carnuntum by courier. Yes, Equitius had become consul and the emperor's most trusted friend, to the no small annoyance of Marcellianus, who had only been able to attain the title of Dux Valeriae.

"This is the firelight of King Gambin's castle, Stilifrída is burning, ignited

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by a civil war's fury!" the people shouted and rushed through the streets with joyful cheers. Initially, seized by the general despondency, Marcellianus hid himself in the Hibernum Castrum. Now he was told of the change in the Carnival mood. There he mounted his steed. Accompanied by a stately retinue, surrounded by mounted torchbearers, he passed through the streets of the city in triumph.

"Hail to the savior of Carnunt, the illustrious Dux Valeriae!" shouted the people, wherever the celebrated one passed. Then again dense groups formed, the events bespeaking in the face of the flame-reddened night sky.

"These are the furious Quads, who are now fighting over who should be the new king and burning each other's courts! There see, there and there and there everywhere fire and flame! Now they are harmless, because they tear themselves apart in a fight of political parties! Rome no longer needs an army to fight off the Quads. Hail Marcellianus, the savior of eternal Roma!"

For several days it remained quiet; nothing of concern had occurred. The event was over; no one remembered the bloody atrocity. -

A glorious early summer day poured almost Italian air over Carnuntum. The sun had almost reached the zenith of its orbit, but the longest day had not yet dawned, nor did the fresh green of spring laugh in the peristylum of the Hibernum Castrum. There stood again the magnificent tent pitched as on the day of Caesar Valentinian's entry into Carnunt.

Just as then, Agrippina was listening to the songs of her Egyptians, surrounded by her friends. A song had faded away, the applause died away. Hastily Agrippina had emptied a cup of sweet wine, in which pieces of ice floated to cool it. She was in an unusually irritable mood, the ladies sensed, and were therefore more concerned to avoid any outbursts of anger from the princess than to devote themselves to the joys of the feast, if one could even speak of joys in the face of such anxious tension.

"You still owe me a tale, a rather pretty tale, my dear Livia!" said the wife of the Proconsul apparently indifferently, but with a trembling voice to the wife of the legion prefect Marinus. The other friends breathed a sigh of relief, for the storm cloud had passed them by.

"My princely friend, remember the ingrate no more; remit this tale to me!" was Livia's calm reply.

"No, that shall never be!" exclaimed Agrippina excitedly, but she added with forced calm:

"It is altogether too charming what I learn in fragments; for verily, soon one will have to be ashamed of belonging to the patriciate!"

"Only too true, only too true!" interjected Julia, the bursar. Livia complied; she began:

"My princely friend! It is well known to thee how the Legate Marcus Equitius, with his abducted mistress Swanhild, himself carried off by the ice,

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miraculously found rescue. Even more miraculous may be that he was saved in Arabona, just where Caesar Valentinian was staying. The emperor took care of his Legate; he had his bride presented to him and was immediately so taken with her that he raised her to the rank of Roman citizen and gave her the name Cygnilla. He then arranged the wedding himself, elevated the legate Equitius to consul, called him friend and confidant, and gave his wife Cygnilla a palace at Acineum. The Germanic bear Swanhild is now the patrician Domina Cygnilla, she who dwelt in a gap in a rock, who came to Arabona dressed in animal skins with only a bundle of poverty, that same girl now rides in a magnificent chariot accompanied by two Lictors. But one more thing thou shalt hear, O Agrippina!"

With that, Livia searched in the folds of her robe and handed the Proconsulin a writing tablet with the words: "This, O my most royal friend, was brought to my husband by a messenger from Arabona. It is the inscription of the altar of consecration which the newly wedded couple dedicated to the gods in thanksgiving for their salvation."

Seemingly indifferent, Agrippina took the tablet and read:

"Snatched through the horror of the waves and the ice, happily arrived from the terrors of the winter storm in the double harbor of life and marriage, Poseidon, the mighty, the sublime, and Hulda, the lovely, the compassionate, resolve the vow of thanksgiving to Marcus Equitius and Cygnilla, his wife." Quietly Agrippina's hand trembled, then the writing tablet slipped from her grasp and fell to the floor. Was it only by chance that the tablet fell into an incense burner, where, emitting an indelicate odor, the wax melted?

"My princely friend!" chased Livia in a gentle tone, "forget the ingrate! Consider, the new nobility has blinded him, he thinks himself equal to the old patricians; punish him with silent contempt, speak no more of him! One thing he is not able to achieve even were he himself made Caesar, and this one thing is the proof of Trojan ancestors! Consider this, Princess, and cast him from you like a worn-out shoe!"

"Only too true, only too true, my princely friend!" said the witty Julia, thinking she perceived that by Livia's words Agrippina was to some extent appeased. But angry looked Agrippina's eyes.

"Who told you then, prefect, that I, Agrippina, I, the Proconsulin, should humble myself so far as to commemorate this juggler? Who told you that? Have busy tongues perhaps brought it to you that Agrippina is grieving over the departure of this striver, or is even jealous with that tarted-up strumpet? Ha, ha, ha! No, my dear, that would be more than unworthy of Agrippina!"

There was a pause; Agrippina looked down in front of her, brooding, and played with the folds of her overcoat. Then she continued in an angry tone: "I was only concerned with the closer circumstances of his marriage; I am more than indifferent to him. I feel no more and no less participation for it than for

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other news that one hears and discusses in order to forget them. I am indifferent to the victory of the Blues or Greens in the circus; indifferent to whether the Alemannic king Macrianus is captured or not captured; indifferent to who becomes Rex germanorum after Gambinius; indifferent to me whether and when and how Equitius marries. All this I only wanted to hear, to discuss, and to forget, - nothing more!"

Agrippina kept silent; she wanted to play the sublimely indifferent, but she did not succeed for the best. It had hurt her deeply that Equitius had passed the adventure with Swanhild in the ice on the very same day, on the very same day that he had taken leave of her, on the very same day that he had kissed her for the last time! And all this she had to conceal and had to appear indifferent! That was hard.

"Only too true, only too true, my princely friend!" said the quaestress, with a mocking glance at Livia, and now thought she had hit the right. But Domina Agrippina was unpredictable today. She threw a wrathful glance at the startled Julia and then said briefly and sharply to Livia: "Leave the philosophy to the philosophers or the presbyters of the Christians! I wanted to hear something new! tell everything; everything, you hear? - But I will ask thee, since otherwise thou wilt prate too much of Equitius, who seems to be very dear to thee!" With this she cast a sharp, inquiring glance at the prefectress, who bore it with calm dignity.

"I await your question, princely friend!" she said calmly. Agrippina, however, lay in the pillows with a frown and a gloomy forehead. Soon she downed a goblet of wine chilled in ice, then she savored again of the fruit before her.

Bitter silence all around. "And what do the people of Carnuntum say to these incidents?" suddenly asked the Proconsulin, as if awakened from a heavy dream. Then Livia thought to comfort the princess, so she said: "All Carnunt speaks of the fact that you, princess, have done everything to banish the adventurer from the good society of our city. It must have been difficult for you and your noble husband to force this concession from the emperor. There is only one voice praising you for saving our patricians from the disgrace of having to associate with the upstart. They idolize you because you performed the miracle of bending Caesar's rigid will!"

"They admire me?" exclaimed the Proconsulin, flattered. On this she pondered a moment. "But tell me, my good Livia," she then asked, apparently indifferently, "tell me, where did the ignoble man take the splendid chariot? Where the state clothes for his domina, where the slaves and slave girls and the precious household goods? Six wagons full!"

"Now I believe it, my princely friend, that you are utterly indifferent to the Consul Equitius!" said Livia. "All this he had already acquired at Carnuntum during the last days of his being here. All Carnuntum spoke of the splendor of these purchases, and meant nothing less than that Equitius wished to take the

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emperor's daughter as his wife. And since all this was unknown to you, he had to be indifferent to you!"

"Yes, that's it, that's it!" said Agrippina, feigning calm. "The ingrate, who despised the steps on which he climbed to power, became indifferent to me. I banished him from my vicinity, his name was never again to be mentioned before me, and so it came to pass that this remained hidden from me!" A venomous glance passed over her favorite slave Nera, then she continued with peculiarly sharp emphasis: "O, how I thank this faithful care of my trusted Nera! O yes, I thank the prudent one for this care. So already here he bought everything, all Carnuntum spoke of it, even my good Nera - of course. She only would not tell me; for his name was not to be mentioned! This loyalty shall be rewarded!"

Once again a meaningful look full of hatred and vengeance met the slave girl. Agrippina feasted her eyes on the trembling fear of the unfortunate and gave a convulsive laugh: "Ha, ha, ha! The Consul-Legate tied to a cave bear! He has already his punishment; banished by me to this! Ha, ha, ha! She, naughty and half-wild, like all these barbarians, a grimacing distortion of a dominatrix in a pageant! Ha, ha, ha! My beautiful legate, how I rejoice at this punishment! On, my dear, faithful Nera, let play and sing and dance and race! Evoe! How happy and cheerful I am! You will get your thanks tomorrow, tomorrow! Today I am too happy! So tomorrow, dear Nera, tomorrow! Evoe! Oh, how indifferent you are to me, you hated one! Ha, ha, ha!"

Nera was annihilated. She knew what this thanks had to say, she knew that today she would see the sun set for the last time. Now to fall at the feet of the enraged mistress? Rather step naked into the lion's den! Perhaps after the feast, if it succeeded, perhaps then one could hope for mercy; so the unfortunate thought. The feast continued.

It was a wild bacchanalia. Trigonon and flute playing and singing trembled through the air. Dancers and servants raced along gasping for breath.

Insatiably Agrippina's eyes glowed in wild fire, goblet of ice upon goblet of ice she hurled down, from hoarse throat her evoe resounded tirelessly, gasping and shrieking with furious lust.

Threatening clouds cast their shadows into the peristyle, initially white, then brown-gray in color. Slowly the clouds drew together. From time to time it seemed as if the gray gave way to the blood color, as if here and there flying flames passed through the air. Then, all at once, smoldering fires sank down among the dancers. With a shriek of anguish, they scattered.

Paralyzing fright silenced the instruments, the bacchanalian hooting; anxious silence fell. But from outside, other sounds came to the ears of the stunned partygoers.

The blaring of battle trumpets and the terrible roar of battle were clearly audible. Searing heat, suffocating smoke and dreadful fire filled the air and eclipsed the sun; blood-red smoke columns wound up to carry the fire-raining

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cloud and to do service with their glowing light to the displaced sun. Desolate noise and howling, the clatter of weapons and the crashing of walls rolled like a hundredfold thunder through the sea of embers.

Rigid horror had seized the women. The sudden transition from the bacchanalian feast to the desolation atrocity robbed them of their senses.

Then an audible cry of terror came in from outside: "The Quads!" The groups that had just been petrified stirred again. Like the lightning that drives into a herd and splinters it so that the animals flee senselessly in all directions, so now the adorned ladies stumbled hand in hand through the peristyle next to the naked dancers, next to the whimpering slaves. At last all, whether mistress or slave, whether naked or clothed, pushed out into the atrium, out through the deserted portico into the smoke-filled forum, out into all the alleys of the castle in mad, haphazard flight.

Confused shouts of fear marked the path of flight long after the frightened had vanished from sight.

Trembling and paralyzed by fear, Agrippina had remained alone in the pillows; only Livia, mastering her own fear, had not left the Proconsulin. Pale and trembling herself, she stood beside the fear-struck woman, laid her hand on her shoulder, and said in a trembling tone: "Up, Agrippina! Come to your chambers, think of a safe hiding place, or prepare to flee! The civilian city is in flames, but I think the castle will hold. Come, there is no time to lose! Come on, princess, follow me, I won't leave you!"

"Alas, my Equitius, why hast thou forsaken me, thou, Carnuntum's only man, that thou alone canst save! Equitius, Equitius!"

These were the cries of Agrippina, drenched in pain, as she sank back again, powerless, into the pillows.... But Livia shook her by the shoulders with the haste of mortal fear and called to her, "Up! Hurry to the Castrum, there you will be safe! Mighty gates and numerous guards protect thee there, come; this garden wall is low, the raining fire dangerous to this tent, come!"

But Agrippina could not stir; in bewildered anguish she continually moaned the name, "Equitius!" and wept and wailed without ceasing. Quickly deciding, Livia seized the senseless one, lifted her in her arms like a child, then put her over her armpit like a sack and hurried, as fast as she could, to the atrium of the government palace, to reach Agrippina's chambers from there via the marble staircase. The atrium presented a pitiful sight. Lamenting and wailing, oblivious of all distinction of status, the fugitives stood there crowded together, naked or clothed. A single feeling dominated them all: boundless fear of death. The gates were wide open, the crew was gone. Livia's arrival was not noticed, so fear had mastered all.

Then Livia let her load slide gently onto the marble steps and seized a wooden slat, which her foot had accidentally bumped against. With this she angrily attacked the slaves, shouting with her eyes blazing with anger: "You

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cowardly wretches and shameless strumpets! Why do you stand there like sheep when they smell a wolf and have abandoned your mistress! Up, help me bring her to her chambers!"

But they did nothing; the fear had risen too violently in all of them for there to be room for any authority. Indignant, Livia returned to the vestibule. There was no sentry, no slave, not even the gatekeeper to be found. Then the courageous prefect's wife resolutely threw the mighty gate wings shut and pushed the bolts forward. Then she hurried to the deserted Agrippina. She was still lying where Livia had put her. After many futile attempts to bring the princess back to her senses, stunned by wine and fright, Livia took her once again on her shoulders and carried her up to her chambers. How eerily lonely were these stairs, these echoing corridors! The tumult of the siege droned fearfully in, and every breeze echoed like ghostly whispers. Eerie glowlight wafted through the rooms that were so horribly empty today! Where were they all, the clients and courtiers? Mortal fear and horror filled the chambers instead of them, they were the only clients in Hibernum Castrum today. Every footstep on the marble steps echoed strangely through the deserted building, every sigh of the panting Domina dragging her unaccustomed burden found its plaintive echo.

There she stood before Agrippina's chambers; the door was locked. Breathing a sigh of relief, she let the almost lifeless woman slide to the floor. There lay the proud patrician helpless before her own door.

Livia pounded; no answer. Enraged, she pounded with her fist on the gold-decorated door so that it thundered through the building, and shouted in a quivering voice: "Open the door, cowardly scoundrels! Your mistress Agrippina demands admittance!"

Then scuffling footsteps became audible; then a fear-stricken voice asked from within, "Who demands admittance? Agrippina's voice sounds different!"

"Open, sissy! It is I, the prefect Livia, who brought your mistress here; open!"

Then the door opened. A pitiful figure of misery was visible. In slave costume, scarcely able to speak, with chattering teeth and shaking knees, the Dux Valeriae, Marcellianus, stood before Livia.

"My Equitius!" moaned Agrippina, half unconscious.

A look of coldest contempt met the sissy from Livia's eye. Trembling, Marcellianus stood before her, neither daring to look up nor to flee. Pointing to the one lying on the ground, she spoke briefly, "Help me get your mother to safety; grab her by the feet, under the arms I will lift her; make haste!"

But the wretch failed to do so. Then Livia picked up the wretched one again and carried her to her columned chamber, where she let the will-less one slide into the cushions of the lectus, the same lectus on which Agrippina received the homage of Equitius. "My Equitius!" slurred Agrippina as she sank back into the cushions.

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Now Livia returned to Marcellianus. "Dux Valeriae! Give me a sword and armor! Thou needest none of these. Wisely you have chosen disguise. A coward times a hundred, and therefore you did wisely not to show yourself to the legionaries!" so she spoke with bitter scorn to Agrippina's son. He shuffled before her with a swaying gait; he did not think of answering, however insulting Livia's scorn was. They had reached the armory. Then Livia put a helmet on her head, hung a sword over her armpit, and seized shield and lance. Covering herself with armor, she spurned without greeting, and without giving the trembler a glance, she hurried for the exit. Marcellianus was already about to close the door when Livia turned once more. "Where are the slaves, the guards, the Proconsul?" After several futile attempts to speak, the coward stammered miserably, "On the walls; what has hands and feet, father took! O, o!----."

Then still with a touch of pity the prefect's wife said, "Marcellianus! Take care of your mother now! Go with me, and close the gate below, then you may lock yourself up here again after all. Try to be at least the shadow of a man!"

But the Dux Valeriae shook his head stupidly and gently closed the door, so that she would not frighten him with another violent shove. Disgusted, Livia turned away. After leaving the gate slightly ajar so that it might be considered locked, she looked around the forum.

All around, like a wall of fire, a continuous belt of flames rose. The masses of buildings in the forum stood out like shadow formations. A dreadful, threatening cloud of embers arched over it, from which a rain of fire whirled down on the trembling castle.

War trumpets and bullhorns, Germanic brass and the roar of the weapons fell like thunder, leaving crumbling masonry after the hail. In between, the hissing clatter of fire, the death howl of many thousands, the crashing of collapsing buildings, all this mixed into one giant wailing sound, all this felt by all senses at the same time: this was able to shake the heart in the body of even the bravest.

Livia wavered; she had to lean on the shaft and gradually get used to the horror. But the courage of contempt for death gradually returned to her breast. She had reached the praetorium where she lived with her husband.

There was more order and calm than in the Hibernum Castrum. Here, too, everything was paralyzed by the panic, but the banner had not been unfurled by such ghastly headlessness as in the palace of the Proconsul. Livia found all, if failed, still at their posts.

After giving courage to the household, she went to the Porta Praetoria, where her husband must be in the Proconsul's staff.

Already from afar she saw the eagle of the fourteenth legion and the standards of the same; there Marinius, her husband, must be.

Pale as one risen from the grave, the Proconsul stood below the gate,

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surrounded by the prefect and the legates, as well as many dignitaries of the colony. All of them were silent and dejected; convinced that Carnuntum was lost.

Then Livia stepped into the middle of the circle and said, "Hail, Proconsul! These arms are yours; I borrowed them from Agrippina, your wife, whom I have well recovered. I hastened hither to report this to thee!"

"I offer thee, Livia-Bellona, greeting and thanks!" said the Proconsul, half absent-mindedly. "Nothing more comforting in misfortune than faithful friends courageous assistance". This the man accustomed to phrases added thoughtlessly, then sank back into his stupor.

Now the prefect Marinius Secundus strode up to his wife and offered her his hand with silent, questioning admiration. But Livia threw herself to his breast and said in a soft voice: "Hold me, my Marinius! I have a presentiment that today Carnuntum's destiny is fulfilled. As we both once braved death together on the Euphrates, so let us seek it together today. It will be sweet to me when I know that you are not caught, and you too shall be granted the consolation of seeing me still fall as a free Roman. Slave bonds shall not dishonor my noble Marinius, nor his noble Domina!"

Touched, the prefect embraced his wife and both held each other intimately for a long time. Words could not find them. The Proconsul stood apart with folded arms; he sent envious glances over to the couple. He, too, had a wife, he, too, had once loved her, he, too, had grown old with her; but where was she now? Will she manifest the high courage of noble feminine pride? Painfully he winced; he suspected it, he knew it, that her courage was only grandiloquence, her pride only the mask of meanness. And his son! - He, too, had deserted him! - And such a wife, such a son, had been envied! - His heart clenched with wild pain as he saw his house, to which he had given such proud splendor, shrink so ignominiously. A warning voice arose in him, accusing him that the high splendor of his house was only tinsel, his glorious deeds only crime; that the proud building he had built on the foundations of deceit and treachery, of betrayal and crime, must finally collapse. In desperate self-defense he resented, rebelling against the voice of conscience. All who gained positions did so, and he who did not follow this ancient law was crushed; it was the impulse of self-preservation, not free will, that drove him on and on, from outrages to crimes: thus Rome had become the world empire, his house what it was! Shuddering, he looked into the abyss of Rome's social decay; to his mind's eye everything suddenly became clear. He had realized with horror that like the state colossus Rome, also his house was ripe for fall. "Be it!" he thought, "be it! the star of my house is extinguished, like that of Rome; but I will fall as a Roman and go to Hades worthy of my Trojan ancestors!"

He had become even paler. Fever shook his bones.

He summoned his bodyguard from the walls, examined and counted them

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himself; there were still three hundred of them and more. Now he handed over the supreme command of the defense of the walls to the prefect Marinius and moved his headquarters to the Hibernum Castrum. A number of people were ordered to report to him there regularly. Then he moved off with his bodyguard to the Hibernum Castrum, the castle of Carnuntum, to stand or fall with it.

Marinius now ascended the gate tower of the Porta Praetoria with his consort and sub-commanders.

The view was gruesome enough.

The civilian portion of Carnuntum was in bright flames. Through the wide fire alley of the Via Praetoria, as if they were comrades of Hephaestus breathing fire, the Germans' raging hordes of revenge rushed in. Huge throwing machines pushed and pulled them in through the completely demolished outer Porta Praetoria, on top of which stood men with water buckets, keeping the thrown material from burning by constant watering; others followed, filling the emptying water buckets anew.

This caused the prefect no small fright. How did the Germans come to have such powerful siege equipment, previously known only to the Romans? Only now, admittedly too late, did he understand the warnings and the stubborn hesitation of Equitius; he uttered loud imprecations about the knavery of Marcellianus and swore by all the gods to take revenge for it, if the fates should not cut his life thread too early.

The ballista was already standing in front of the Porta Praetoria; what it accomplished was astonishing. But next to the ballista stood an old man who guided it with foolhardy contempt for death. He seemed almost invulnerable. Spearmen and archers had orders to cut him down, it seemed easy for anyone to hit the gray-haired chest, which was barely covered by the shield, and yet no projectile could hit the old man. Marinius recognized him, quickly the legionaries retreated, for it was Suntarolt the terrible Hagestalde. The ballista threw the stones at the portcullis, which bent precariously, and splintering wall debris pelted down from the badly wounded gate tower. Marinius also let his ballistae and catapults work. Now the superiority of the Germanic siege equipment became apparent. The Roman catapults were immovably walled in; each of their projectiles flew the same path and hit the same spot. The besiegers could easily avoid the projectiles, so the Roman ballistae did them no harm. The Germanic ballistae, on the other hand, were agile; their throws always changed the direction of flight and therefore had powerful success. Then the huge portcullis collapsed with a roar. The besieged prepared to give the invading enemy a hot reception by pouring down molten pitch and burning sulfur. But how astonished they were when the Germans did not storm yet! Who could have warned them of this trap? Had they suddenly become wise? The ballista played on; nothing was able to set it on fire, nothing was able to drive the Teutons away from it. When one fell, it was withdrawn, and two

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others took its place. The gate tower was close to collapse. Marinius with his retinue was forced to abandon it. He did so, but ordered the useless litter to be hurled down on the besiegers. It was quickly torn out of the wall bedding, doused with pitch and sulfur and hurled down on the besiegers, burning, in order to protect the gate from further attack for a short time. With the burning litter, however, the front battlements of the tower also fell to the depths, crashing and rumbling. The heavy load had carried it away. The crew of the tower had lost the battlements.

A wild sneering laugh went up from the Germans. Then the ballista was turned, and its maelstrom of stone throws hit the wall next to the gate tower a few moments later. But now Suntarolt took care that the projectiles wounded only one point of the wall at a time. Cracks were already appearing and the wall began to sway. The prefect thought to support it with timber, but it was too late. A mad crash ran through the trembling wall, then like liquid metal it flowed down into the trench, almost filling it, itself building a bridge for the stormers. Forgetful were all attempts to close the breach. The trumpet signal blared. The third cohort with its flags occupied the opening in the wall. Then a stream of javelins rushed in through the breach, followed by a hail of stones. Then with a terrible roar the wall breach was rushed, Suntarolt at its head. Three times they were thrown back, once old Hagestalde even rolled into the ditch, but each time he remained unhurt.

Then pale horror seized the legionnaires. Through the breach in the wall they saw Erchantaug's terrible band of twelve with ravens and dogs moving along the trench, silent as ghosts. Behind them rode six maidens dressed in gold, followed by a steed on which sat the dead King Gambin in armor, as if he were alive. Claspings him, behind him sat a bent female figure veiled in black veils; this was the queen of the Quads. Now seven armed dead men on horseback followed the dead king. Six battle maidens, equal to the first, concluded the gruesome ride. The legionaries stood as if they had seen the petrifying head of the Gorgon.

"Think of Equitius, thou brave third cohort!" cried the prefect, almost in despair, "think of him, and acquire his admiration! Up! Valentinian and Equitius!"

"Valentinian and Equitius!" cried the legionaries, but hollow and failing sounded the shout. Soon it was drowned out by the roaring brass of the Germans. Suntarolt at their head, they came running for the fourth time in berserk fury against the gaping wounded wall.

"Romans, follow a Roman!" now shouted Domina Livia. She snatched the eagle of the fourteenth legion from the hands of the standard-bearer and rushed toward the grim Duke Suntarolt. Shouting "Valentinian and Equitius!" Marinius leapt after his consort like a lion. At the same time the two reached the breach in the wall. There already stood the terrible Hagestalde swinging his massive ash shaft. Livia attacked him with her lance. But like the whip of a

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playing maiden, the mighty one knocked the lance out of her hand; without using the weapon against her, he thundered the words of wrath to her:

"Blitz and blue fire! Woman, go bear children, for here Duke Suntarolt seeks men; he has found none!"

"Here you will find one, and more than a thousand others, you bear-skinner!" cried Marinius angrily, thrusting Livia's lance against the Hagestald who stood at the head of the wedge. With a furious battle cry, the Storm Wedge pressed after Suntarolt. Duke Suntarolt caught the lance thrust so violently that the iron of the lance stuck in the shield, but the shaft shattered. At that moment a javelin came hurtling along and pierced Livia's unarmed breast. With a low groan, she collapsed, the legionary eagle still sinking in her raised right hand. "Marinius, follow me soon!" she cried in a dying but firm voice, her breaking eye fixed on her husband. He threw his shield from him, caught the sinking woman with his left arm, and grasped the pole of the legionary eagle, which the dying woman, holding it convulsively, did not let sink. With a swift jerk, Marinius had torn his wife's mortal projectile from her wound and pressed the last kiss on her pale lips.

Moved, the Hagestalde lowered his ash shaft, the fight rested for a short span of time. Friend and foe were deeply shaken. The corpse of Livia in his arms, the eagle swung high, Marinius with his sword picked up again, death-defyingly advanced on Duke Suntarolt. But he did not raise his ash shaft yet, but shielded himself against the sword stroke only with the shield, then he shouted, with signs of astonished admiration:

"By the victorious Aesir! Romans, give yourself up! Duke Suntarolt grants you peace and honorable care, as if you were a king! Free and without slave fetters you may dwell in Germania, because you are the first man to meet him! You shall be honored as a hero, give yourself captive!"

"The Roman conquers or dies; defend thyself!" with that Marinius, his dead wife in his arms, advanced on Suntarolt with the fury of despair. Suntarolt swung his shaft and shouted: "Hoihö! You Germans, follow me! Carnuntum is ours, Gambin is avenged-----"

But these were his last words, for Marinius' steel was already deep in his breast. Wildly his eyes rolled, convulsively he clutched his heavy ash shaft, then he staggered and plunged with a booming thud through the gap in the wall into the Castle. He was the first German, albeit dying, to break through the last wall of the Marc-Aurelian colonies' girdle. The prefect jumped over the fallen duke, once again closing the wall wound with his body and that of his dead wife. Then a double axe whizzed down upon his head, and silently Marinius sank with Livia on the dead duke's body. Thus Marinius and Livia found death together at the borders of Danubius, which they resisted together on the shores of the Euphrates.

"Valentinian and Equitius!" cried a centurion, and with several legionaries

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sprang to cover the gap in the wall. Others carried the bodies of Marinius and his consort, together with their weapons, to safety. They were carried in arms to the Hibernum Castrum to show them to the Proconsul.

By Sutarolt's fall the soldiers of Carnuntum had been revived with new courage. Grimly they threw themselves against the onrushing Teutons. At the top of their voices, confidently, they resounded, "Jo, Valentinian and Equitius!" Once again the Teutons had to give way. Legionnaires were already dragging up new posts and beams to bar the breach, when, seized by panic, they lowered their weapons and beams. Erchantaug with his terrible retinue came rushing up. With a powerful leap - it seemed as if it were carried by wings - his snorting white steed jumped over the rubble and stood inside the castle; unstoppable the twelve-strong band behind him, then the Wal-maids, then the murdered dead king with his black-robed wife Gotelind and finally the sword-gripping army of the Germans. All resistance had ceased, Carnuntum was lost to the Romans.

The army of the Germans filled all the streets of the Castle. Erchantaug stopped at the Forum. The Groma ⁽¹⁾ was overturned.

The mighty gates of the Hibernum Castrum trembled under the blows of the double axes; they still held.

In the vestibule as well as in the atrium of the castle of Carnuntum the bodyguards of the Proconsul held firm, ready to receive the invading Teutons with a salute of arms.

There stood the Proconsul Maximianus without retinue, beside him without will, his trembling wife Agrippina. Now the gate wings finally began to waver, and began crashing into the vestibule. But even still they restrained the storming intrusion. With confused eyes wide open, Agrippina stared out into the vestibule. The resistance was weak, then the guards threw their weapons away and scattered, shouting. Others threw themselves at the invaders and whiningly begged for mercy.

Now the Proconsul drew his sword. With his left hand he embraced his frightened wife, and with his right he thrust the sword into her bosom. The flashing of the weapon before her eyes brought the unfortunate woman back to her senses. She tried to escape her husband's grasp, wailing for her life, but after a short struggle Maximianus had done his work. Horrified, the Proconsul stared at the twitching, bloodied figure of the once-proud Agrippina his sweet. Anew he raised the sword to give himself death; but powerless the arm sank. Maximianus was too cowardly to turn the murderous steel against his own breast. In the face of the invading Teutons, he ran from one to the other of his bodyguards, lamenting shamefully, crying out, "Friends, Romans! Is there no

(1) The sign of Roman rule in the middle of a city Forum. It was a richly decorated marble column with an eagle on top. From this point the milestones of the military roads were then calculated and set.

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one among you who will do his Proconsul the favor of thrusting this sword through his breast?"

But no one heeded his request.

Before the invading Teutons, the guards fled back to the peristyle, where Agrippina's ceremonial tent stood; stunned, Maximianus ran along, the Teutons behind him with loud hooting. At last a man of the bodyguard felt pity for the unfortunate Proconsul. He drew his sword and ran towards him to give him the coup de grace. But there, insane fear of death seized the proconsul. Rebounding, he cried out in a shrill voice, "Lictors, protect your proconsul from the murderer!" Scornfully, the man threw the sword at the Proconsul's feet and silently returned to the others. But the Proconsul did not dare to join his bodyguards anymore. Suddenly he was seized backwards, pulled to the ground and gagged. The Teutons were masters of the Hibernum Castrum and all Carnuntum.

They led the bound Proconsul out to the forum and tied him to the Groma that had fallen into the dust; this was the place of shame for the captured deputy of the emperor. There were Erchantaug's band of twelve and Gisalhild with her valkyries. Gambin and his entourage of the dead were also posted there.

Erchantaug and Gisalhild were dismounted and had passed through the Hibernum Castrum with both their retinues; it had fallen to Erchantaug as the winning lot.

The nobles and powerful Carnuntum citizens who had fled to the Hibernum Castrum were soon brought out of their hiding places and were for the time being closely guarded in the peristyle; all of them were now slaves. There Erchantaug had all the treasures in the various chambers brought out. Hauling all these riches to the Peristylum was the first slave service of the prisoners in the Hibernum Castrum. Domina Julia carried enormous vases on her back down the wide marble steps to the peristyle. Tears welled up in her eyes as she beheld the abandoned ceremonial tent in which she had luxuriated as a quaestor, she who was now a poor slave.

On their tour of the proud building, Erchantaug and Gisalhild encountered a locked door. Axe blows knocked on it, not wanting to wait for the door to open. The wings flew back with a crash. Two wailing figures in slave costumes became visible. Scornfully, Aistmuth wanted to send them to the peristyle with the others.

Then Erchantaug spoke angrily, pointing to the old man, "That is the villain Licinius, guard him well!" Erchantaug wanted to say more; but Gisalhild, in a surge of anger, had summoned her sword from its scabbard and, like an irritated lioness, had rushed at the younger of the two slaves.

Trembling in all his limbs, he stared the enraged one in the sparkling eye, then he sank to his knees before her, wringing his hands in the greatest fear of

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death, but was only able to stammer out the name "Lydia!"

"You called me Lydia, the royal child of Gambin, who was murdered by you! Do you still think of it, you knave of shame, then you also know that my hands give you death!" With these words Gisalhild raised her arm for the death stroke.

"On villain!" she cried, "thou assassin of my father must die! His castle fire thou shalt adorn as the last of the slaves, so at the last falling gate of the gods' castle, you will hurt thy heel. Eternal limping in the realm of the blessed will be your punishment and scorn!"

"Let me live!" whimpered the weak one, "mercy! Let me be the last of the slaves, whip me, only let me live!"

Then Gisalhild, in utter contempt, thrust the whimperer from her with her foot and said:

"Only now I see it, for my father's sacrifice to the dead you are too wretched! Your cowardly body shall not desecrate my father's grave!" Then the fearful one breathed a sigh of relief and said, as if in gratitude, "Yes, Lydia, you are right! I am cowardly and dishonorable; I am too bad yet to wear the slave fetters; I am all you want, if you will but give me life!"

Seized with disgust, Gisalhild thrust the sword back into its scabbard and left the chamber with Erchantaug.

Licinius and Marcellianus were taken into strict, segregated custody.

The victors ruthlessly exercised the right of victory in the city, which was consecrated to destruction - and destruction was indeed consecrated. Through all the streets, into all the palaces, ravening crowds of plundering Teutons and robbing Slavs poured. The brutal law of the strongest was raised to the highest by the latest lived events, the exciting battle scenes wildly inflamed. Female charm became a curse. What was young and beautiful, whether mistress or slave, fell prey to the unbridled rage of unleashed passion. Male strength was fit for slavery. Weak women and old men, on the other hand, were too bad to be prey; they were made fun of. They could consider themselves lucky if they were simply pushed down and not martyred to death. Jewels, golden temple offerings, coined gold or other precious objects were dragged together and marked with the house brand of the one who called it his according to the right of victory; noble horses and hard-working prisoners, no less.

Thus robbery and murder, violence and desecration raged through the unhappy city. Some of the Teutons, but even more of the Slavs, fell under their own swords, which they bent against each other in the blindness of greed for booty. Terrible torments awaited the unfortunates, in whose houses they were unable to extort from them the secret hiding places. Woe to them if their expectations were not fulfilled; what was the value of a human life in those terrible hours? -

Erchantaug had left the Hibernum Castrum with his retinue. He silently threw himself on his steed and rode through the city. A gloomy cloud lay on

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his forehead. He saw the horrors of devastation, something like pity took hold of his feeling heart. He had to say to himself that this was only a small retribution for the excessive outrages heaped on the defenseless people for centuries. But the horrible fate of the individuals moved him painfully, because many of them paid for the guilt of others.

And now he learned from his walk that even his own warriors were fighting each other, that they were fighting each other for the booty they had made, that they were slaying each other out of common greed! Unspeakable lamentation rippled through his heart when he perceived how many were more animated by greed for booty than by enthusiasm for the holy war. But he noticed no less that mostly Slavs and Germans faced each other in the fight for the booty. Then Gambin's word of warning fell heavily on his soul; he had not wanted to believe that the alliance with the Sarmatians was disastrous for the Germans. Now he realized with terrible clarity what a mistake he had made. But he had stirred up the movement under the pretense of Siegfried and therefore could not revoke his own word, his own deed. However, for the duration of this campaign, the cause of the quarrel and thus the quarrel itself had to be eliminated. Therefore he rode back to the forum and climbed up on the tribunal; there he blew powerfully into his horn, calling the army to assembly. Only a few weeks ago Caesar Valentinian had spoken from there to the now destroyed fourteenth-doubled legion.

The Germanic army was assembled. Erchantaug raised his spear and shield, the ravens circled his head and the white dogs made a sound to indicate that he wanted to speak. Silence fell.

Erchantaug began:

"Struggling peoples of Germania and Sarmatia! Carnuntum is ours, and soon one shall ask where it stood! The brave fighters have shown the Roman that they are tired of oppression, tired of arbitrariness, tired of disloyalty, that they are powerful enough to make atonement for immoderate iniquities, and will take it all! But happiness blinds you! Mournfully the Victorious Aesir see it. They foresee coming strife. We are marching to Rome, but it is not the will of the battlekeepers to conquer Rome! In Rome we want to force Caesar Valentinian to fulfill our desire; only language shall determine the borders of the peoples. Let Rome remain Rome; Gaul, Gaul; but we want to be Germans and conquer those lands where the German tills the fields, but the Roman reaps the harvest. And you, who are Slavs, want the same! Each of these great tribal kingdoms may then order itself as it pleases. But no German, no Slav, no Gaul, no Roman shall be subject to the other! If you want to strive for this great goal, then raise your shields and give a cheer!"

Loud cheers resounded between the booming clatter of weapons; then it was quiet again.

Erchantaug continued to speak. He told them how it would be half a

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battle victory if the army of nations marching against Rome would only preserve unity and avoid all causes of discord. Neither of the two experienced nations had priority over the other, both the burdens, and both spoils should be equal. Every fellow traveler, whether king, nobleman, or commoner, must face the same dangers and take the same number of steps to Rome.

Therefore, the booty should be divided equally after the return; all special booty should cease. First, it was to be divided into two halves between Germans and Slavs, as the two confederated peoples, the Slavs being equal in number. The two halves were then to be sent separately to their homeland and each comrade on the journey was to receive his share after his return; the share that could not be divided would then be awarded by lot!

This, too, seemed good and wise to all; no one objected.

"We are going to Rome!" Erchantaug concluded his speech. "We will destroy its legions and raid the cities that are yours as booty. But according to the law of the army of many centuries, which the great Alexander had already kept, "we let the farmers sit untouched on their ancestral farms ⁽²⁾; these remain unplundered! The country shall not be depopulated, because the peasants are then your serfs according to the old victor's right. The same right divides their fields into three parts; two of them belong to them, one of them to the victor as a master's field. The peasant, however, must plow your master fields while you harvest.

Notice that and do not destroy your future property! But plunder the cities, and when they are plundered, burn them down, for the cities are the breeding grounds of Romanism and its vices! Let no stone that the Romans lay on another in the German lands be left thereon; if you need cities, then build them yourselves according to your needs. For an evil spirit blows through Roman buildings, poisoning those who dwell in them; you would become like the Roman, cowardly, bad and rotten!"

Enraptured by the enthusiasm, the German cheered him as did the Slavs; unanimity reigned from then on.

Erchantaug descended from the tribunal. He ordered the Walamaids to the wake around Gambin. He himself, however, went out with his retinue before Carnuntum, toward the sunken castle.

The horrors of before began anew, only Germans and Slavs no longer turned their swords against each other, since there were special goods neither to win nor to defend.

Also from the Hibernum Castrum prisoners, horses and booty were brought out to the forum, because all special property had ceased.

In dull brooding, the unfortunates lay and stood on the forum in

(2) Sachsenspiegel, Book 111, Chapter 44, Paragraph 2 and 3.

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confusion, with tattered clothes, often barely clothed or not clothed at all. All distinction of status had ceased. In stunned pain, the former slave lamented what she had experienced in the last hours to a still recently proud dominatrix, who hung on her neck, teary-eyed and seeking consolation. There again, wrapped in the set of a precious state toga, a previously aloof dignitary lay wailing at the breast of a miserable shoemaker who comforted him. The misfortune had made all the same; only the height was different, from which the fate threw them down.

At the forum the division of booty was made. Two long trains of packed slaves and beasts of burden left the sacked city. Both trains moved across Trajan's Bridge. Over there, one moved east; it was that of the Slavs. The other moved northward to Stilfrida.

The city as well as the castle had been plundered. The colossal statues of the Caesars Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla had been smashed for the sake of the precious metal and dragged away in pieces; this was also done with other cast iron images. At that time, Germans had no sense of art; the material was valued according to its worth, but the form was of no value if it could not be used.

There was nothing left that was worth dragging along; torches were thrown into the castle. The rising moon threw its pale lights into the horrible blaze of the burning city. The flame quickly spread; even the largest squares, the widest streets no longer allowed the victors to defy the ghastly blaze; they moved out of the judged city to make camp outside.

Chapter 20

Urda's Magic Lock

Runic inhibition spells, as Erchantaug had announced to Hagestalden, were to prevent the Romans from ever returning to Carnuntum. In front of each of the four gates of the judged city, a bonfire was to take place, and above it a hill, called a Hutberg, was to be piled as the dwelling place of the fallen heroes. Guarding the castle grounds was entrusted to the dead. Armed, they were to awake from their sleep and prevent the Roman from returning, should he long for Carnuntum.

Thus, on the day after Carnuntum's destruction, a square was prepared at the Limes in front of the *Porta principalis sinistra* in the west, as well as in front of the *Porta principalis dextra* in the east, on each of which a huge pyramid-shaped pyre was piled up. The same happened in front of the *Porta Praetoria* in the north, as in front of the *Porta Decumana* in the south. Care was taken to ensure that the firebeds were placed right in the middle of the streets, as close as possible to the Roman Gate, because the Hutberg, blessed with powerful magic, was supposed to prevent access to the destroyed city. This was Erchantaug's command, and this was how Urda's magic barriers were piled up.

The wooden pyramids, probably more than seven men high, rose mightily in step-like layers. They were hung with precious cloths supplied by the loot, and on top of each was placed a bisellium throne, such as Carnuntum kept in abundance. This was to be the stately high seat for the one to whom the castle fire was consecrated. At his feet was placed every man's dead horse for a joyful ride to Valhalla.

Thus King Gambin was placed in the high seat in front of the *Porta principalis sinistra* in the west, Duke Suntarolt in front of the *Porta principalis dextra* in the east. These were the most distinguished seats, because they were

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situated above the Limes. The high seat in the other two shield castles in the north and south were occupied by other outstanding battle heroes who fell before Carnuntum. The remaining fallen heroes of the avenging army were placed on the upper steps of the pyramids together with their steeds as the retinue of the lord of the shield castle; the lower steps, however, were occupied by Roman corpses. Fetters and bands were put on them, because they were the slave retinue of the dead shield lords above in Valhalla. Rich treasures and booty were piled up around the high seats, because it is fitting for lords of men to be honored as lenders of treasures over there in Valhalla.

Thus everything was in good order when the sun rose for the second time above burning Carnuntum, whose glow still fought with the dawn for precedence.

Then the army of the victors drew near and surrounded King Gambin's shield castle. Bragewalt harped and sang the lamentation for the lofty king. Praisingly he sang of his heroic courage, of his sublime leniency, of his death, as well as of the loud royal speech of his people.

In still silence the song died away. The women sobbed softly. Only the clatter of the ravenous sea of flames roared horribly, enveloping the still half-towering gables and towers of Carnuntum like the lake of fire through which the sun hero had ridden when he freed Gerda.

The warriors prepared to do the honorable ring ride around the dead Gambin Shieldburg; however, an unexpected event hindered this undertaking.

Two strangers of unusual size appeared before the king's bed of fire; no one knew where they had come from or who they were. They were an old man with a harp in his arms, and a stately woman in the fullness of life: both of them, however, of a noble, unapproachable nature, appearing superhuman. Proudly and awe-inspiringly they went along, all present sank to their knees.

Before the king's bed of fire, the old man began to harp; and the enigmatic woman sang these verses:

*"Wake up, Gambin! Gisa is waking you up,
your royal child and Walfather's desired maiden;
To the honored one give the sharp sword,
Erchantang's balm, Volante's work.
Gambin, my good king and koting,
Awake, thou best of all,
In helmet and breastplate, with broad sword
And shield and gleaming, dripping spear!
You, Eticho's heir, have truly become
Only ashes and dust, you proud nobleman?
Will not grant Gisa's honors,
My princely father in the grove of the dead? -*

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*So bear then, king, the tidings full of harm!
Do not let the fire burn your bones,
If thou wilt deny me Volante's weapon,
That sorcerer's sign, with precious girdle!"*

Terrified horror seized the Queens. Gisalhild rushed forward to disturb the terrible necromancy. It had become clear to her: The singer spoke in her name to her dead father, she cruelly summoned him instead of her for the sword; but all this without her will, her advice, her command. But with noble decency harper and singer silently defended against Gisalhild's interruption. The latter stood erect, defiantly looking before the two; Frau Gotelind, however, had sunk weeping into her daughter's arms.

The old man harped on. Then he sang Gambin's answer as a counter-strophe ⁽¹⁾:

*"Gisa, my child, where do you boldly go?
With rune staves you call the dead?
You wish the sword for yourself,
to the sorrow of many who live after me!"*

Again Gisalhild wanted to step in between. Bragewalt repulsed her with the words: "Queen Gisalhild! Let them go! The song is sacred and proclaims the word of the Gods! Otherwise it would be an outrageous game, and no singer would dare to do such a thing! This was not clear to her at first, but she complied with Bragewalt's pardoning words.

Already the singer sang the answer:

*"Give only the gift, the whirring sword,
Do not worry about dangers of nations, blessed one!
Gisa fears not, nor Walballa's-wild woe,
Give the inheritance to the only child!"*

The singer replied:

"I tell thee, Gisa, what shall come:

(1) The alternating chant, the primordial beginning of all dramatic representation, incidentally, the archetype of the German theater. Mistakenly one looked for this in the monastery mysteries of the Middle Ages, but these had taken over the mystery play from the Germanic paganism and Christianized it. The old-mythical play, as well as the old-mythical dance, they had persecuted and outlawed as antichristian. Hence the dishonesty of the actors in earlier times. Certainly the actor would not have been ostracized for dishonesty if the German theater had really found its cradle in the monastery. Only the smell of paganism led to the anathema of the church, to dishonesty, to ostracism.

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*The Balmung devours thy whole lineage.
But the dead man tells you: A son after you
Shall need the Balmung and will plunder Rome!"*

To this the singer replied:
*"I conjure thee timid restlessness;
None of the dead shall lay and rest,
Until Gisa of Gambin the Balmung bids,
The Armor-Hewer, the Helmet's Harm!"*

Then answered the harpist:
*"Drowsy strumpet that thus urges
And rides around the dead, robbing them of their rest
With rune staffs and magic spears,
With defiant armor before the dead castle*

The singer:
*"I honored thee noble, princely father,
In stride to adorn the castle of the dead;
Give me, Gambin, the gift of the gods,
That Shield-breaker, he's no good to thee."*

The harpist:
*"Manly daughter, thou dost boldly urge me,
Before the flame flutters around the shield castle,
I'll hand you from my lofty perch,
Daughter, the Balmung, and not mount it."*

The singer:
*"Hail to thee, my father, thou princely hero!
So will you hand me from the lofty perch
The sharp sword? A more beautiful gift,
Than even inheritance of the German throne!"*

The singer:
*"So take and have the helmet's harm,
Have long and need the breach breaker,
Look on the edges, they shine with poison,
To furious choking in heaving walls!"*

The harping was at an end. Then the harpist turned and handed to the astonished Gisalhild the king's sword together with the hilt; no one had seen where he had taken it from. It was the same sword that Erchantaug had given

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to King Gambin on the day he brought his daughter back to Stilifrida; it was the sword of exchange of the god. With trembling hands Gisalhild took the precious weapon from the harper's hands; she would never have dared to take it from her dead father's side. Now she raised her eyes to her father in the high seat. In his lap stood the sword that he had given to Erchantaug in exchange. Then Gisalhild turned pale. She herself had clothed the dead father, she herself had put the man's ornament on the high seat, she herself had put the god's sword in his lap! She had not left the corpse; how had the exchange taken place? - Trembling, she still held the dead man's sword in her hands when the harping began again and the singer entered:

*"I have and hold the Helmet's Harm,
The sword of fire, my father's gift!
Princely father, I fear not,
What my sons after me will do!"*

The harpist sang:
*"Farewell then, Gisa! I gave you the sword,
That kills twelves with magic,
When it comes from the scabbard, to cut the shields
On the happy waving fields of the castle!"*

And the singer concluded with the swan song:
*"So greet then your graves all
With harmless rest! it calls me from here.
From here I must hasten, from here I must ride,
Where glittering red the terrible fires glow!"*

Silently and without greeting the harper and the singer had come, Silently and without greeting they went again; soon the mysterious ones had disappeared from everyone's sight.

Shyly one looked after them, but nobody dared to follow them.

Now the torches were brought. With trembling hands Queen Gotelind laid hers on the Shield-berg of her dear Gambin and then collapsed, sobbing loudly, overcome by deep pain. Gisalhild anxiously assisted her.

Soon the bergfire was in bright flames. To honor the dead male ruler, he was ridden around in multiple rings; loud shouts from those riding around were considered a farewell greeting. In the innermost ring, in front of her shield maidens, Queen Gisalhild rode.

The flames licked upward, pattering, and wafted their crimson folds around the silent king, guiding his soul to the castle of the gods. But how small, how inconspicuously small, did not this unusually mighty castle-burning seem against the mile-wide hearth of Carnuntum in its overwhelming

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horrifying splendor! The flame had not yet satiated itself on the sinking city; unweakened, the blaze rose up to the sky to destroy what it had saved for nourishment for centuries. As in an immeasurable lake of fire, the floods of flames surged and ran in a roaring surge against the white-hot sensory belt of the civilian city.

Like a tiny brazier stood the king's stately bed of fire beside it, like a poor torch beside the terrible lamp of Vesuvius.

Then there sounded a cheerful horn call from the mountains; soon Erchantaug's band of twelve approaching in storm ride became noticeable. The wolves jumped lively, the ravens fluttered airily, and Erchantaug's heroes filled the seething fire air with cheerful yelps. But it was not the old cloak-bearer Erchantaug who came flying at the head of the band of twelve. It was Austrorand, the disenchanting son of Erchantaug! As a sign of disenchantment, the shape of his shield was changed as was his helmet. The dragon had a firebrand stuck in his throat, which seemed to suffocate him.

"Hail to the son of Erchantaug, King Austrorand Wurmbrand!" shouted the warriors of the mounted Markomans of the Saxon tribe, as did the Swabian Quadss fighting on foot, who now merged into one, the German people, welcoming their own happy future in the Son of the Gods.

Unstoppably, however, the band chased along and rode with the others around the stately castle fire of Gambin. Gisalhild had noticed Austrorand; she steered her steady beside his, her maidens behind her, so that beside each of Austrorand's warriors rode a Valkyrie.

"Austrorand, my Austrorand!" cried Gisalhild, joyfully moved. "Is the spell broken, does your sunken castle already tower in the air, or did you come only for a short time to honor my dead father?"

"The spell is broken, my good Gisa!" said Austrorand.

"Already the quarxes are entrenching on the top of the stone, to raise the castle. Honor give the dead king, and end the holy war! Then begins Austrorand's work for the blessing of the Germans. Then Austrorand fetches his bride to the castle on the stone, to the King's Hall of the Germans!"

The castle fire had burned out.

Gambin's ashes were put into a golden amphora, for which the heaviest and largest among the captured ones was chosen. The ashes of the remaining warriors, the horses, the hounds and falcons, as well as those of the bound Romans were piled up around the urn, to which some weapons and other precious objects were added, so that the dead, dear lord and his proud followers would not ride into the land of the blessed without any treasures.

Now the noblest of the army took up the shovel and threw the coals and

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burnt remains in the form of a ring wall around the treasure, while others in shields and helmets dragged earth to pile up the Hutberg over it. Then Randmar, the marshal, came panting; he had searched long before he was able to offer the thing he sought as a consecration to his dead king. "If I cannot bring you, my dear king, the real head of Valentinian into your shield castle, then make do with the one of stone; soon Valentinian himself shall leave his!" With these words the marshal rolled a huge stone head in front of Gambin's cinerary urn. The faithful servant hunted through the burning city; he had searched for a statue of the emperor, which he then cut off the head to give to his dead master in the grave. Quickly the mound grew in a beautiful circle over the heads of the builders; already it covered the Limes, already it surpassed it; but on and on it grew up, lifted by the whole army, until the top was formed, which surpassed the height of seven men.

Then Bragewalt, the singer, stepped in front of Gambin's finished Hutberg, in order to cast the spell of consecration over it. It was a magic song that was sung while the hill was covered with turf bricks. Both had the purpose of preventing the return of the dead as ghosts.

Many hundreds of pairs of hands were engaged in cutting out the sod bricks and dressing the mound with them, while Bragewalt sang:

*„So sing' und sag' ich Urdas Weibbann
Dir hebrem Hutberg des Helden!
Beut Wohnung dem Toten, beut wonnige Träume,
Beut sanften Schlummer und Schlaf!
Des Ruhmreichen Ruhe störe kein Sturm,
Nimmer verlass' er sein Lager.
Doch wenn einst wieder im Waffengewoge
Rasselt das räub'rische Rom,
Dann fahre heraus mit fürstlicher Folgschar,
Du kühner König und Koting;
Wehre mit schwirrendem Sonnenschwert
Dem neidfrohen Naher Carnunt!
Wenn deutsche Fluren Feinde bedräuen,
Wehre den widrigen Wölfen
Und wache im Hutberg als behrer Wardein
Ob unserer Ahnen Erbe! —
So sing' und sag' ich Urdas Weibbann
Dir hebrem Hutberg des Helden! —
Es stirbt das Ross, es stirbt der Freund,
Dann soll man selber sterben;
Doch nie verlöscht des Namens Glanz
Der Nachruhm sich geschaffen.*

*"So I sing and say Urdas votive spell
To the hero's noble Hutberg!
Provide the dead dwelling, provide blissful dreams,
Give gentle slumber and sleep!
Let no storm disturb the rest of the glorious one,
Never will he leave his camp.
But when once more in the battle of arms
Stirs the robber Rome,
Then come forth with princely retinue,
Thou bold king and koting;
Defend with whirling sword of the sun
The fierce folk near Carnuntum!
When German fields are beset with foes,
Resist the odious wolves
And watch in the Hutberg for a noble guardian
For the heritage of our forefathers! -
So I sing and say Urda's vows
To the hero's noble Hutberg! -
The steed dies, the friend dies,
Then you yourself shall die;
But the glory of a name is never extinguished
In the fame that comes after.*

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*Es stirbt der Vater, es stirbt die Frau,
Dann soll man selber sterben;
Eins sag ich nur, das nimmer stirbt:
Des kühnen Königs Nachruhm!
Es sinkt der Leib, es löscht das Licht,
Es rosten Schwert und Schild;
Doch leuchtend lebt der Ruhm im Lied,
Das fliegt von Volke zu Volk!
Die Zeit vergeht, die Zukunft kommt,
Vergänglich ist die Kraft;
Doch Heldenruhm im Sangesreich
Verweht erst am Ende der Welt! —
So sing' und sag' ich Urdas Weihbaun
Dir hebreu Hutberg des Helden!
Wir decken Dein Bette, die bergende Burg,
Mit Rasen als Riegel der Urd:
Der Tote, er ruhe im Totenreich
Und lasse die Lebenden leben.
Drum schlafe, Du Herrlicher, harmlosen Schlaf
Im behren heiligen Hutberg!
So sang und sagt' ich Urdas Weibbann
Dir, herrlicher Hutberg des Helden.'*

*The father dies, the wife dies,
Then you yourself shall die;
One thing I say that never dies:
The bold king's fame!
The body sinks, the light is extinguished,
The sword and shield rust;
But glory lives brightly in songs,
That fly from nation to nation!
Time passes, the future comes,
Power is fleeting;
But heroic glory in the realm of song
Only blows away at the end of the world! -
So I sing and say Urdas holy song
To the hero's noble Hutberg!
We cover thy bed, the sheltering castle,
With turf as Urd's bar:
The dead must rest in the realm of the dead
And let the living live.
Therefore sleep, Thou glorious one, harmless sleep
In the holy, sacred Hutberg!
Thus I sang and said Urd's votive spell
To thee, glorious Hutberg hero!*

The king's Hutberg was ready.

Once again, a parade was held, then the army moved over to Santarolt's castle fire to hold it there similar to King Gambins. Smaller army detachments built the Leeberg in front of the Porta Praetoria, and in front of the Porta Decumana.

Thus the duty for the dead was fulfilled; the right of the living raised its head again.

Inwalt, Erchantaug's house marshal, was working up at the stone with the quarxes on King Austrorand's palace. They threw up ramparts, dug trenches, carved towers and gates, and built the castle.

King Austrorand-Wurmbrand, however, gathered his army and ordered it anew for the southern march to Rome.

The Queens, together with the battle maidens and the stately followers, went home to Stilifrida.

For a few days, however, the terrible fire raged in Carnunt, until its calcified walls collapsed into slagged rubble. Searing clouds of vapor bubbled up from the glowing earth on which Carnuntum had stood; like a shadow, it struggled to break free from the ruins, as if it were the mourning Genus of the place, waving goodbye and leaving the desolate site forever.

Chapter 21

Caesar Valentinian's Death.

Panic had paralyzed all the rulers of Pannonia, Noricum, and Illyricum; unexpectedly the devastating blow had been struck by the Teutons; perplexed fear had increased the danger to an immeasurable degree; all Rome trembled. Pannonia, Noricum and Illyricum were without an army; the German-Sarmatian confederates had likewise destroyed the legion thrown at them, as they had routed Carnunt's double legion. The traffic between the fortified places and the municipalities was interrupted, the flat country was in the victor's power. The individual towns which had been spared had been put in a state of defense as best they could in a hurry, but helplessness gave the orders and despondency carried them out.

After three days of rest in front of the burning Carnuntum, Austrorand-Wurmbrand had led the army of nations further south. He had made good use of the three days of rest. Swift messengers had hurried ahead of his army. They announced to the peasants that the day of their liberation from the yoke of the Roman landed aristocracy, the provincials, was approaching. The peasants were to remain "undefeated on their farms", because the army of the nations wanted to free them, but not to liberate them! For the time being, he should pay no more taxes, but deliver the yield of the third part of his fields to the new lord, otherwise he should be free to rule and reign in his farms. Protectors would be appointed to him so that he could plow the fields without fear. The army of nations would not plunder and burn any farm, would not capture any peasant, any peasant servant, would not drive away any cattle; it would pay for its needs with coined gold according to the usual value. Only abandoned farmsteads were to be masterless. Thus the army king's messengers had spread the news over the land.

A cheer ran through the trampled, exhausted people. They stood up and unanimously chased away the Roman tax executors together with the nobility the Roman provincials had imposed on them. They fled to the nearest castle,

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spreading fear and horror. The forces in the strongholds were increased by such an influx, but soon evil ruled, for the fugitives brought only their bare lives with them and wanted to be fed. The supplies were soon exhausted; hunger, however, fostered despondency and despair. Austrorand had conquered the country even before his army of nations became visible in it. So he stood before Aquileia, determined to go straight at Rome to strike the Roman lindworm in the heart.

Things were no better in Acincum. Equitius was still there, although he had advanced from titular consul to real consul, that is, to mayor of Rome. In the next few days he was to leave there, when Merobandes, who was replacing him, would have arrived. He took in his firm hand not only the protection of Acincum, but also that of Bregetium and in general of the country west of the Lacus Peiso ⁽¹⁾, whose wide water level as well as miles of marshes he knew how to use excellently. But what could the individual do now, when everything seemed lost! He was only able to protect a small part of the country; he lacked the power to hinder Austrorand's army. But he prepared for the future the war of revenge in the land of the Quads by having bridges built, which could soon be erected when the right time came. That time seemed to be approaching. Valentinian stood with an army on the Rhine against the Alemanni king Makrian. The latter, more fortunate than Gambin, had escaped all traps and had caused the emperor much trouble, but had not won final victory. Now a peace was hastily concluded, which offered him more advantages than the Roman. But the army of Valentinian was free and advancing. On this Equitius built his hope. The road to Rome, however, does not lead from Carnuntum via Bregetium or Acincum, and so it happened that Equitius did not see a single Teuton. As far as Syrmium in southern Pannonia the left wing of the army of nations had advanced.

A strange coincidence saved the city of Syrmium, where Caesar Valentinian's cradle had rocked, from Carnuntum's fate.

The shadows of terror had preceded the grim German army and had thrown everything into the most terrible excitement in the imperial chamber estate of Pistra. There the bride of Caesar Gratian, Valentinian's firstborn, was resting at noon. She was on her way to her fiancé. Massala, the procurator of Pistra, fearing that Emperor Constantius' daughter would fall into captivity, saved the princess by a bold ruse. He let the retinue of Gratian's bride continue the journey, but instead of the imperial bride herself he secretly let a slave girl mount the precious palanquin. The emperor's daughter, on the other hand, he led himself, disguised in an inconspicuous chariot, to Syrmium ⁽²⁾, only twenty-six miles away. Only a few, but determined horsemen formed the escort.

(1) Today Lake Neusiedl with its marshland, the so-called Hansag.

(2) Today Mitrovic, the birthplace of Caesar Valentinian, whose father was a rope maker there.

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Once there, the refugees found the city dissolved in mindless fear. Probus, the praetorian prefect of Syrmium, was busy preparing to flee. The only thing that excused him was that he was not a military but only a civilian dignitary. Massala not only prevented the escape, but encouraged Probus to the point of making up for what he had missed and putting the fortifications in defensive condition. Indeed, the enemies, who were soon to storm, were offered such a strong resistance that they withdrew without first resorting to a proper siege. After the withdrawal of the enemies, Probus wrote to the emperor urgently requesting help. This letter was received by Caesar Valentinian in the small Helvetic fort of Robur, on the campaign to the Danubius.

The confederated peoples were in front of Aquileia. There the flame of discord between the Germanic and the Slavic peoples broke out anew. The Germanic tribes had done the actual war work, but the main part of the booty fell into the lap of the Slavs. Now the Sarmatians had enough of treasure, so they felt a longing for comfortable idleness. They no longer cared about the march to Rome, and Caesar's approach worried them; how easily could he steal the booty from them again, and many other things were still uncertain. So they held a secret council on how to begin, in order to let the stupid Teutons take the expected blows on their own. Messengers were sent to the emperor. They came humbly to Valentinian's army camp, kneeling and begging for mercy, because they were the innocently seduced ones, only the evil Germans were to blame. Yes, they even offered the emperor an alliance and made themselves available to attack the Germans in the rear. The army of the Germans might have been lost if the Slavs had been more clever and had not groveled so dog-like before Valentinian.

If the emperor was never choosy in the means he used, he still had a remnant of chivalry, which is inherent in every brave man. When he saw the wretches kneeling before him with the rope on their necks, he was overcome with both rage and disgust. He began to rage, vowing to cross the Danube and take terrible revenge on the Germanic tribes and the Slavs at the same time. Then he ordered the envoys to be whipped out of the camp. Frightened, they hurried away and brought the fearful message to their own people. Now the Slavs secretly departed from Aquileia to reach their homeland by the shortest route. Robbing and murdering, they roamed the countryside, where the peasants fell victim to them all the more easily because they had trusted Austrorand's words.

Thus Austrorand was forced to start the homeward journey as well.

Could he know whether his treacherous Sarmatian confederates would not burn Stilifrida for the loot piled up there?

Immediately the army set off for home. He soon realized how shamefully the Slavs had ravaged the defenseless people. Now he pursued the faithless and caught up with them. Soon he had wrested the illegally made booty from them and forced them to make amends as far as possible for the damage they had

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done.

Then he thought of using the advantages he had gained. He occupied the country around Carnuntum almost as far west as Vindomina and as far east as Lacus Peiso, placed strong garrisons at the mouths of the valleys leading into the Norse mountains, so as to have these mouths of the road always in hand, and seized the Simitirich ⁽³⁾, as the key to the road to Rome. Vindomina, which had not yet fallen, he locked up tightly by these precautions, hoping to bring it down later.

Then he threw half of his army into the new castle at the stone and appointed Aistmuth as burgrave over it. After this he went home to Stilifrida. There he planned to gather new armies to be safe against Rome as well as against the Slavs. -

This was the situation when Caesar Valentinian left Vindomina at the head of his quickly gathered army to hurry to Bregetium via Carnuntum.

Gloomy and silent, Valentinian rode out of Vindomina's gates. But the terrible, which his eye should see, was not long in coming. Already behind the last watchtower outside Vindomina, the landmarks of the war of vengeance began. From step to step they became clearer. Now Valentinian noticed a small ruined castle, the walls torn, the towers broken; the burned-out window openings grinned out of the sooty walls like the eye holes of skulls; that had been Ala Nova ⁽⁴⁾. With clenched fist the emperor rode past.

Already the next post was in sight: Villa Gai ⁽⁵⁾; this too had been destroyed. Puffing with rage, Valentinian rode on. Then he saw something that made him tremble with anger; he thought it was mockery. He clenched his fists in rage, convulsively squeezing his thighs so that his horse seethed in the curb and reared like mad.

Not only was everything here devastated in the most terrible way, the road littered with the slain, but all the milestones were missing. They had not been smashed, but removed, as was clearly shown by the freshly dug pits at the Limes, where they must have stood. The riddle excited him; silently he rode by. Already the shattered towers of Aequinoctium ⁽⁶⁾ beckoned.

Then Valentinian noticed the first living thing in the miles of death. There were five men in ragged clothes. Ahead strode a stout old man with feral grizzled beard and head hair that fluttered in tangles about a ruddy face. A lance served the old man as a support, a sword he had hung around his neck, the round shield he carried on his back. It was a Roman, because the sword hung on his right side. The four who followed him were also armed. They

(3) Simitirich = chamois area; today: Semmering.

(4) Ala nova, today: Klein-Schwechat.

(5) Today disappeared; an arm of the Danube runs over the place of the old Villa Gai. It has the significant name: "brick water".

(6) Fischamend.

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carried, as if it were a stretcher, a burden on their shoulders. The emperor looked sharply. His anger flared up anew, for he had realized that the burden was a milestone. So these were the milestone robbers, but the mystery was not yet solved.

Now the old man had noticed the approaching Romans; a cry of joy escaped from his chest. He was visibly overtired. This could be seen in the stride he now took to approach the cavalry squadron: with the help of the lance shaft he pushed forward languidly. At last he had reached the horsemen. Then he recognized the emperor; he sank to his knees and cried with tears of joy in his eyes: "Hail, Caesar Valentinianus semper Augustus! Caius Publius Petronius, the centurion and veteran, the favorite of three Caesars, the only one of the inhabitants of Carnuntum who survived the atrocity, hails the approaching avenger!"

But this greeting could not banish Valentinian's displeasure. With a furrowed brow he called out to the disappointed favorite of three Caesars: "What have you criminally done with the milestones? Speak, Centurion!"

"My exalted Caesar!" replied dismayed, yet undaunted Petronius. "Nothing criminal have I done. The ancient milestones shall never suffer the ignominy of showing the barbarians the way to Rome, or of being insulted by them! They are well preserved here in this cistern ⁽⁷⁾ when the barbarians are defeated, then it is easy to put the well preserved stones in their old place."

The emperor was appeased, but he did not agree. He shook his head angrily and silently followed the veteran to the cistern. There, like coffins in a tomb, several milestones already lay bedded. Sadly Valentinian looked into this strange grave. Breathing heavily, he then spoke to Petronius: "Veteran! I praise your love for the honor of Rome and can hardly blame your actions, even if I never approve of them! Do you lack confidence in the future of Rome so thoroughly that you bury the monuments of almost half a thousand years of Rome's rule in these lands like dead men? Have you not read the names of the glorious Caesars which they bear on their stone foreheads? Hast thou forgotten that the divine Rome, like the phoenix, ever more glorious and proud rose to the sun's height after such destinies?"

But undaunted, with transfigured eye, the addressed looked at his Caesar and cried, "Caesar! Were I so deluded, I would have left the milestones standing as the corpse-stones of eternal Roma, would have entwined them with cypresses and thrown myself on my sword! They shall and must rise again, and the name of their restorer Valentinian shall be emblazoned thereon in golden letters! But the ignominy of showing the barbarians the way to Rome, that ignominy should be spared them."

(7) Recent discoveries brought to light a cistern in the area described, in which several milestones actually lay. This strange find was a mystery to our archaeologists until now. The poet is allowed many things that are denied to the archaeologist!

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The emperor was moved by the enthusiasm of the fanatic. He was moved by the fact that the old man preferred the dangerous, tiring activity in the devastated countryside to safe asylum in Vindomina. Caesar, who was used to more hollow flattery, felt attracted to the old man. Therefore he said in a mild tone: "Now, my brave veteran, you can conclude your well-intentioned action; lower this stone to the others, then come with me! You yourself shall raise them again!

Petronius did as he was told. The emperor ordered a horse to be brought, on which he told the veteran to sit down and ride beside him to Carnunt. The veteran's slaves were ordered to join the troop.

So they rode on.

After a longer silence the emperor said: "You said, veteran and favorite of four emperors -"

But feeling improved, the veteran fell into the emperor's speech, forgetting all about propriety: "My gracious Caesar! Nothing better will I seem than I am; I have had the good fortune to be the favorite of three Caesars, not -"

The emperor smiled and continued his speech, "So you said, favorite of three emperors and favorite of Caesar Valentinian, you are the only one, the last of Carnuntum? Who then are the four men who follow thee?"

But Petronius was not yet able to answer; he had not dreamed of the happiness of being called the favorite of four emperors. Valentinian first had to let the torrent of words of his thanks flow over him, if he wanted to hear the report of an eye-witness and companion in fate of the terrible event. The happy man spent a truly Ciceronian treasure of words to glorify all his happiness in a beautiful speech. He had studied rhetoric in his youth!

When that was over, the emperor repeated his question. The veteran prepared to recount his experiences.

"My exalted emperor!" he began; "yes, that is the incomprehensible truth! Out of many hundreds of thousands of people, I am the only one who found salvation -"

"Who are the other four?" asked the emperor.

"Four of my slaves who escaped death with me." The old veteran did not count the slaves as people.

"It was a hot thirsty day" he continued, "I was lying in the triclinium of the Elephant's Tavern in front of some cool wine, and did not suspect that the Teuton was just outside the city. Then my faithful Patroclus came in. Lord!" cried the brave, "Lord, order your house! the Teuton is burning the city, fires are flying in swarms like swallows in spring! We hurry home. There is already fire all around; the people run headlong through each other, the legionaries flee and shout: The Teuton has broken down the gate! I want to stop the escape. Then Patroclus grabs me rudely by the arm and pushes me into my house: 'Lord, you don't have time for others, think of yourself!' I did as he

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commanded. In the house we dragged my few poor treasures down to the deepest cellar. All the food we had, and a large stock of bread and cheese, which the good man raised, without my knowing how and where. All this happened so quickly that I did not have time to think or give orders, I could only obey as if I were the slave and he the master. The excellent man also brought down a resting bed for me and ordered me to lie down on it; I also did this. Finally he brought me weapons and tools for digging. For what purpose the digging stuff?' I asked. He said: 'To save you from imprisonment, I will bury the cellar; when the danger is over, I will dig you out! And you,' I asked, understanding what he wanted. You had five slaves, in the future you will have four; they are enough. I will be captured or slain, but you will be saved! Then I wanted to hold him in order to consult with him, as well as to save his life, but he hurried away and threw the cellar door shut. Not long after, there was such a thudding and rumbling that we - I and my four other slaves - thought the house had collapsed. The screams of the looters were already coming from outside. Then we felt smoke and heat. The clever Patroclus must have set the house on fire to prevent the looters from entering. But we were trapped as in a tomb. At first the blue sky looked in through a small cellar neck, but soon thereafter a gloomy cloud of smoke, and later for an indeterminably long time only red, blood-red burning embers. Unbearable heat oppressed the chest, made breathing difficult; the walls steamed and felt hot like the walls of the oven. Then we extinguished the lamp, because the terrible glow offered more brightness than necessary to see, to comprehend the fate that we had been shown. How long, how many days this lasted, I don't know; day and night were indistinguishable; but it must have been a week, if not more. We were tormented by a terrible thirst, which the warm wine only increased, for the insipid, tepid water burned in our parched throats instead of refreshing them. In the first days we saw from the safe hiding place how the enemies seemed to wade like salamanders through the fire; they drove away prisoners whose backs were heavily loaded with booty, and committed atrocities that otherwise only the arena affords to see. Gradually, however, things quieted down; the barbarians must have left the city. From afar the roar still penetrated our prison; then I knew that the enemy had not yet departed, but might well be encamped in front of the city. The fire continued unabated; the walls were hot, as if they were glowing. We breathed the air of fire. Then I had one of the wine amphorae put aside; into it we dipped linen cloths to refresh our half-fried limbs; it was dreadful. Finally the fire subsided; day and night were distinguishable again. But it still lasted five days and five nights before the last glow died away. Dead silence all around. Howls of wolves and caws of ravens told me that the enemy had already left. Then I thought of escape. For not only the heat alone made our stay unbearable, but also the terrible stench turned it into the scariest dungeon in which a criminal has ever served his time. But the iron cellar door was still red-hot, and so we had to

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wait for it to cool down. The next day we managed to open it. It creaked as it turned on its hinges. Debris came trickling in. A laborious mole-work began. Only after two days the debris was rummaged through. We saw the blue sky again, breathed the air of heaven again! We stepped out of the grave; there it looked eerily enough. All around, everything was desolate, empty, burned out, a single large corpse, the corpse of the dead Carnuntum!

We went out to look for the castle. On the half-buried streets the slain lay around half charred, half consumed; howling the wolves fled, cawing the ravens fluttered up, frightened away by their ghastly meal. There stood formations of horrible appearance; once they had been magnificent marble image columns, now they resembled petrified ghosts; they had crumbled and burned to lime! Shudder upon shudder, horror upon horror, heaped each step forward. There stood the castle! What a sight! The gates broken, the walls cemented with decaying corpses of men and horses! We climbed over the rubble into the castle. The Hibernum Castrum was a heap of rubble; the Praetorium, the Forum were unrecognizable masses of rubble; only single wall fragments protruded from it. The Groma, the holy Groma, my emperor, toppled and shattered! I stood and cried like an underage child! Then I took the oath to protect the milestones from barbarian rage! Speechless, hardly powerful, I stood on the forum. A heavy thunderstorm was slowly rising; we did not notice it. Then the clouds broke, and the torrent of rain and hail poured down without a lock. The long-desired rain was eagerly drunk by the dried, fried earth. We were also refreshed by Jupiter's rainfall. We took off our clothes to refresh our scorched skin. So we sat naked on the forum! My emperor, in broad daylight! - Suddenly we were violently frightened. What were those sounds around us? Vapors were rising, hissing all around in every nook and cranny, as if all the snakes of the desert of Libya were gathered here, to the population of the ruins. At first I thought that the abundant rain was dampening the smoldering remains of coals, or cooling the glowing masonry; but, oh horror! - The hissing was followed by a terrible crashing of swaying columns, falling gables, and crumbling masonry debris that sank into whitish, hissing mists. Corrosive, milk-white streams then trickled through the streets, steaming like boiling broths. Then I saw how the many-day embers had burned parts of the walls to lime and how the cloudburst had slaked this precious lime. The calcified half-broken columns swayed, it crackled through the crumbling marble structure, and hissing, the witnesses of former splendor melted away and strove like hot tear streams toward the Danubius. It had become very cold; we wrapped ourselves in our drenched clothes, but did not dare to seek shelter under one or the other of the remaining vaults; we did not dare to expose ourselves to the projectiles of the rain-dissolved, disintegrating buildings with the falling wall debris; we did not dare to approach the boiling

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hot lime streams. Thus, depressed by the unheard-of misfortune, we remained huddled in the middle of the Forum, by the rubble of the destroyed Groma. With bones shaken by the frost, we waited for the storm to end. Lamenting and bowed down, we then sought out our eerie troglodyte dwelling again."

Petronius had finished his report; Valentinian had listened with participation. Shaken by the terrible tragedy of what he had heard, he rode in silence beside the veteran. Then a sigh lifted the emperor's chest. "And you know nothing of the Proconsul, nothing of the legions?" he asked in a sad tone, as if he knew what answer would follow.

"Sir! You ask too much!" replied Petronius, "He will hardly have fared any differently than Quintilius Varus did centuries ago. ⁽⁸⁾ The number of slain is so great that the good fourteenth must be lost; the least part may have been captured. Saved certainly neither the Proconsul nor a legionary. Certainly, my Emperor, the best have fallen, the good languish in slave fetters!"

Again they rode along in silence. "All Carnuntum destroyed, three legions lost!" cried the emperor painfully, as if talking to himself.

"It cannot be otherwise, I know the war well, my Caesar!" said Petronius; "but this also I know: Carnuntum would still stand to-day, had not Marcellianus done that knavery, Rome to harm and shame!"

Then a strange look of the emperor clung inquiringly to Petronius, and lurkily sounded his question, to what deed of the Dux Valeriae the veteran attached such importance. But the nature of the question escaped the favorite of four emperors. Without argument he told how Gambin was murdered, and how it was only the berserk revengeful rage of the Germans that nothing was able to resist.

He also expressed the opinion that the removal of Equitius had been fatal for Carnuntum.

The conversation faltered again; darkened and silent, they moved along the Limes. The ruins of Aequinoctium had long since been at their backs; they had already come very close to the dead Carnuntum. To the left of the procession a swamp widened, behind it impenetrable woods stretched, trickling with suspiciously iridescent dark moss-colored water. Close to the Limes, however, stood a lonely weather-beaten alder. Petronius had recognized it well; he had turned pale. Involuntarily, he thought of the eerie ride he had taken with Marcellianus and the others. Where were they all? Where was the Dux Valeriae, where Licinius and the friendly Phanius? Really all dead? Had only he, the only one, been passed by the terrible goddess of vengeance? Then the veteran trembled in all his limbs; he saw how the ghostly tree shook itself, and this shaking he knew only too well. As if seeking help, he reached for the emperor's hand, which he noticed in amazement and stopped his steed. "Away, away!"

(8) In the Battle of Teutoburg, exactly 360 years before the events described.

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cried the veteran in horror; "away, my emperor, the ghostly tree!" But calmly the emperor said, "Stay! Licinius has told me of your night ride; I know the tree. Perhaps he has something to tell me, too!" The veteran wanted to stop him, but there was no time; these words sounded hollow and eerie from within the tree:

*"What thou dost seek, thou dost not find, Prince!
Carnuntum is destroyed eternally,
Magic and plentiful pine have barred
Door and gate of the judged city.
Flee the track of smoking vengeance,
Or follow it; thy fate is fulfilled!
As today you see Carnuntum destroyed,
So think thou in few days!"*

The emperor blanched, Petronius trembled. "Away!" he called once more; Valentinian followed him in silence.

Now, out of the floodplain forest, slagged, broken towers and walls, shattered gables, single pillars and vaulted arches rose up before them; these were the remains of Carnuntum. They rode on; no one spoke a word. A new obstacle hindered their way; the emperor trembled silently. In the middle of the Limes, blocking the way, just outside the city gate, stood a mighty grassy hill! How did it get here?

*"Magic and plentiful pine have barred
Door and gate of the judged city!"*

With quivering lips the emperor murmured these verses to himself, then he steered his steed down from the Limes. He circled the hill in a wide arc until he had regained the height of the Limes on the opposite side. Without knowing it or wanting to, Caesar Valentinian had thus honored the tomb of the avenged Gambin by riding in circles.

But the path that the emperor's steed had trodden through the flying ash around Gambin's Hutberg, this path was trodden wider by the horsemen who followed the emperor, and the legionnaires who followed him took to the road. This road, however, still draws half the arc around King Gambin's heroic bed, after more than fifteen hundred years. Armies and herds, plows and mail wagons animated this road just as in difficult times full of sorrow and suffering, as in happy times full of jubilation and hopefulness, all drew the semicircle, unconsciously honoring the hero's grave like Caesar Valentinian, around the hill, which still stands today, as it was erected a millennium and a half ago.

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Through a wide gap in the wall they rode into the desolate city. Ravens cawing flew up from the meadows, the howling landlords of deserted battlefields, the wolves, fled from the riders; that was the greeting of the raging city. And there? That was a statue of the Emperor Valentinian himself; it still stood there since Caesar's entry. The inscription still bore remnants of the gilding. "Salve Valentinianus!" the statue seemed to call out to the emperor, greeting him like an old acquaintance. But the greeting was not a cheerful welcome, for the greeter had no head. Randmar had fetched it and placed it in Gambin's Hill next to the gold urn.

A bitter ache tore through the emperor's chest; Valentinian thought he could feel the scorn of fate from the mutilated statue. A chill trickled through his bones; he pinched his bloodless lips together and rode on. They had reached the forum. What a devastating sight! More ghastly than the burned-out ruins, more terrible than all the other witnesses of destruction, was what the eyes of the riders, accustomed to horrors, now beheld. Above the splintered ruins of the Groma rose a strange framework. Three strong wooden posts rose vertically from the black earth to the height of three men; their upper ends were connected by crossbeams in the shape of an equilateral triangle. It was the sacrificial scaffold of Wuotan, the gallows. Three distinguished Romans dangled from each of the three crossbeams. All of them were completely undressed and their bloody backs showed that they had undergone scourging before their death. With a shudder the veteran recognized them. There hung the Curul-aedil Candusinius, next to him the military tribune Vologes Paetus, and so on the others whose names found no place in these sheets. And yet, how mildly these nine had been treated in comparison! Three others had been treated worse, although they were still alive. They were also stripped and tied to the three supporting posts of the gallows.

The first was the Proconsul Maximianus. His arms and insignia, with which he had been caught, were broken and torn and nailed to the gallows above his head, as were his ears, which had been cut off. In place of these, they had sewn donkey ears onto his head. His tongue had been split. His mangled back showed that he had suffered a far more severe scourging than the hanged.

The second of those so terribly marked was Marcellianus; a torn slave robe fluttered over his head. Also nailed above him were the parts of his body that had been taken from him: the ears, the right hand, and the left foot, as well as the tongue, which had been cut entirely from his throat. He, too, wore donkey ears; he, too, had been horribly whipped.

The third was Aedil Licinius. He had received the same treatment as the Proconsul. But his mouth had been sewn shut on top of that; that was the prerogative of the upholder of Roman law.

Also over the consular Aedil Licinius fluttered the slave dress, in which he had been caught. If the hanged ones were dead, though their bodies were still warm, these three, though still alive, were in a dying state. They were

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immediately given all possible assistance, but only the Proconsul came to, but was unable to speak. Soon all three had succumbed to their suffering.

Enraged, the emperor stamped his foot and swore to take terrible revenge for this outrage. A somber silence brooded over his retinue. Without waiting for Valentinian's order, the gallows were pulled down, a funeral pyre quickly erected, and the twelve corpses burned on it. A makeshift tomb, piled up from the rubble of the palaces, was to mark the place where their ashes lay; when Carnuntum was rebuilt, a special tomb was to be erected for these blood witnesses.

The emperor himself had lit the cremation fire, then he had mounted his horse to leave Carnuntum. He had not waited for the tomb to be erected; it had been left to others.

The emperor rode across the forum; only then did he notice the tribunal. Astonished, he stopped in front of it.

Colorful carpets and blankets surrounded it; a mighty wooden pile towered above it. On top, however, stood, according to Roman custom, a precious resting bed. On it lay the bodies of the brave legionary prefect Marinus with his generous wife Livia. Both were bedded on the lectus in full armor with all the insignia of their dignity, as if loving hands had given them their last allegiance. With embraced arms they rested on this place of honor. Livia's honorable wound was clearly visible. Beside rich consecration gifts also two killed steeds lay according to Germanic custom at the bed. The steeds could hardly have been cut down an hour ago, however, for their wounds were still oozing with blood.

It was clear: the barbarians wanted to give an ambiguous welcome to the entering emperor. They must have had exact knowledge of his coming, for this tribute to the Prefect, like the desecration of the twelve on the gallows, had been carried out shortly before the emperor's entry.

But it astonished Valentinian still more when he caught sight of a brazier at the feet of the heroic pair, in which bluish flames were playing; two torches lay crossed before it. On both sides of the brazier, however, were incense burners that emitted fragrant fragrances in light ringlet clouds. On the white marble wall of the tribunal, however, was written in charcoal:

"Austrobrand-Wurmbrand, the German king, to Valentinianus, the Roman Caesar:

Imperator! The brave honors the brave! Your commander Marinus and his heroic wife Livia preferred honorable joint death in battle to captivity. Both sought and found heroic death arm in arm in the crevice of the wall of the Porta Praetoria of the Carnuntum Castle. Marinus killed the best of the army, Duke Suntarolt, then they both fell, spurning the offered mercy and freedom; only over their corpses did the avenging army of the victors enter Carnuntum. The German king offers these braves, honored by him, as a gift to the Roman

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Caesar; honor also you, Emperor, the brave pairs' bed of fire by the expiatory purifying flame!"

The emperor had read this with eyes flooded with tears. A murmur of applause ran through the Emperor's entourage, but it did not dare to rise to the enthusiastic cheer in view of the deeply shaken Caesar.

Silently Valentinian had taken one of the two torches, silently Merobandes, the commander of the army, had followed his example. Soon columns of smoke rose from the corpses' fire. Then Valentinian stepped onto the already burning woodpile, took the laurel branch from his own head, broke it in two, and laid a laurel circle on each of the two corpses as an imperial dedication.

This was rewarded with loud cheers from the whole army.

Seriously and silently, Valentinian mounted his steed again.

The corpse fire had burned out, which spoke more clearly to emperor and army from this highly significant place than the best orator would have been able to do.

These ashes were also buried in front of the tribunal for the time being. After the castle was rebuilt, the tribunal itself was to be the tomb of the two. - But this never happened; the force of the barring spell of Urda were too powerful!

Now the emperor led an exodus, which had been even sadder than the entry. Through the half-buried Via Praetoria the train moved to the Porta decumana, passing the small temple of Ebona ⁽⁹⁾. The preliminary final destination of the journey was to be Scarabantia ⁽¹⁰⁾, where the emperor hoped to find the consul Equitius.

The plague breath of the many unburied slain prevented camping on the Forum, as Valentinian planned, therefore the camp should be made in front of the ruined city. The camp was set up where a year ago the fourteenth legion had been held in review. The place had not changed, but where was the legion?

Petronius was given permission to return to the city to gather his belongings, since he intended to move on with the army; a maniple of legionaries and his slaves accompanied him. Then the road led them past the Tavern to the Elephant; Petronius entered. He did not want to leave Carnuntum without having said farewell to this favorite place.

It looked terrible enough. The atrium was covered with the corpses of the girls once tended here by the Lares of the house, Bromius ⁽¹¹⁾, Ceres and Venus. Horrible things must have happened that the poor things affected death instead of slavery. Horrified, the veteran was about to flee the scene of the atrocities when his foot bumped into a previously unnoticed corpse. It was

(9) Remains of this temple were uncovered in 1886, inside the Porta Decumana.

(10) Today Oedenburg.

(11) Bacchus.

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that of the wearer of Carnunt's most daintily folded toga, the ever-cheerful Phanius.

"So then must I see thee again, my poor merry friend?" cried the veteran, with tears in his eye. "Thou, too, shalt have thy grave, and these poor things shall escort thee to silent Persephone!"

But there was a lack of wood as well as time to procure such for the cremation of the corpse. Therefore, the dead girls were placed in the impluvium and the old parasite in between them. Then Petronius lifted the three statuettes of the Lares from the altar and placed them next to his dead friend; he also put three silver denarii in his mouth to pay the ferryman Charon. Then the legionaries covered the impluvium, which had become a tomb, with rubble.

"Poor friend!" said the veteran, "you shall have your funeral oration, too! Forgive me that I force you to stay here as a ghost until your body is reduced to ashes ⁽¹²⁾. But your spirit is not alone; it stays in company of friendly girls, to whom it was always favorable in life, to whom it consecrates first its wealth, then its poverty! Venus, Ceres, and Bromius,, these three Olympians you worship most highly; may it be they who commend you to the grace of Jupiter Serapis!"

Weeping, the bowed man, wearily leaning on the lance shaft, left the last tomb of friendly memories. Alone, alone had he of all remained alive; homeless, thrust with gray hair into a foreign land. His fate stirred the legionaries, sadly they crept behind the wavering one.

Soon his destroyed home was reached and his belongings recovered; the last inhabitant of Carnuntum left the dead city.

They passed the Quadrivium Sylvania; what a sight it was! The arch images gone, the gilded roof tiles of ore lifted off, the proud dome toppled; only one arch still rose into the air ⁽¹³⁾. But the eye, accustomed to such horrors, hadn't even noticed it; uninhibited they passed.

They had reached the camp. There the emperor stood darkened like a statue and looked over the desolate debris field. From the stone, however, the new ramparts and towers of King Austrorand's castle gleamed in the gold of the setting sun, and the axe blows of the hard-working carpenters thundered down. The emperor pretended not to notice, and no one dared to show it to him. And he had seen and felt it anyway, felt it; but in Scarabantia he hoped to soothe his sore heart at the breast of his friend Equitius.

Therefore, he set out early. In the evening, the army had reached Scarabantia; Equitius was not there. So he continued to Sabaria ⁽¹⁴⁾. After a

(12) Therefore, the corpses were burned, so that the soul would not be prevented from its journey to Hades. The buried soul stayed next to the grave as a ghost until complete decomposition. Thus the belief.

(13) It still stands today and is known as the Heidendor.

(14) Steinamanger; in the Hungarian idiom still called Sabarca. *Today, Szombathely, Hungary.

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short rest, accompanied only by a few Alen horsemen, Valentinian set out during the night; the army followed in rapid marches.

Before the sun had set, the emperor had entered Sabaria through the half-destroyed Porta Praetoria. The gate was quickly closed behind him, as safety demanded. However, the gate tower was badly wounded by the sharp burns it had suffered; a crackling and crashing sound shook through it, and crumbled rock trickled through the cracks in the vault. Nobody paid attention to it.

Equitius had hurried to meet his imperial friend. Then Valentinian jumped from his steed and flew to Equitius' chest; for a long time they held each other embraced in front of the astonished people. Only after Caesar's bitterest pain on his loyal friend's breast had softened under bursting tears, Valentinian returned Sabaria's greetings.

Exhausted, the emperor withdrew to Sabaria's Hibernum Castrum; he felt ill and tired, but he did not want to admit it. Equitius saw this with authority. But he knew his imperial friend too well not to know that he was not allowed to discuss this. Quickly resolved, bold and daring as in the field, he began to look after Valentinian's welfare, and did not shrink from prescribing even to the emperor with calm firmness what he thought good, as if he were the emperor's personal physician and courtier in one person. With a gloomy smile, the master of the world complied with the consul's orders. Barely an hour after his arrival, therefore, the emperor was already refreshed by a bath with all the highly trained accoutrements that no other people of the old or the new age, except the Romans, knew how to give to their baths.

Instead of the praetorians who had stayed behind in Scarabantia, horsemen surrounded the imperial bathhouse, serving as the bodyguard. Dense crowds of curious people occupied the streets.

Then a man from the crowd approached one of the horsemen, pointed to the roof of the bathhouse with an expression of utmost terror and shouted: "Look on the roof, horseman, what an ugly bird of death is sitting there! Just now a great owl has settled on it with a rushing flap of wings like an ominous cloud of hail!" The horseman threw his long lance at the animal, in vain; others came, arrows and stones flew around the ominous bird, but it remained sitting, unfrightened and unharmed; hoarse and eerie the owl call ⁽¹⁵⁾ sounded like a ghastly mockery.

Gradually the night had fallen, but the frightened people wandered restlessly through the streets of Sabaria.

Then one of the people shouted in a frightened tone: "Look up there, two fiery comets at the same time! They announce disaster, misfortune to the emperor, to the empire! Woe, woe to us!" And away rolled the fear-stricken

(15) Ammianus Marcellinus. Lib. XXX. 5. This, like the following proclamations of doom, is told full of the most devout seriousness.

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waves of people.

Then the city prefect came to Equitius with two magistrates, asking for advice and help. To calm the people, Equitius stood among them and announced in the emperor's name that all fear was groundless. The Sarmatian would sit at home trembling in anticipation of the just punishment, since the pardon he had asked for had not been granted; the boasting Teuton would very soon be humiliated. Nothing was to be feared, everything was to be hoped for. Tomorrow already Caesar Valentinian would move via Bregetinian to Acincum, where the army would gather for the war of revenge. From there the Roman eagle would fly over the Danubius to the Rhine, in order to seize the rebel Macrianus in the back and to chastise him; then it would go in proud victory flight to the North Sea and the Baltic Sea! "But that you Sabarites may realize," Equitius continued, "what good omen the gods offer, consider that tomorrow the emperor will ride out through the Porta Praetoria, that is, through the same gate through which he rode in! This points to good success and short duration of the forthcoming journey, as well as to a soon happy return. The omens of doom are not for us, but for the enemy!"

Fickleness is the people's way; only a moment ago they had been defeated and failed, now they hurried cheerfully through the city, and "Hail Valentinian, hail the world-dominating Rome!" they shouted from the crowds that roared through the streets.

In the emperor's bedchamber, however, things looked less hopeful than Equitius thought it would be good to let people believe. Equitius, concerned for Valentinian's well-being, took advantage of the lack of the usual court servants to keep a constant vigil on his imperial friend like a chamberlain.

Sleepless, the emperor tossed and turned in his pillows, and many a sympathetic yet calculated word of comfort was needed to give sleep to the master of the world. He groaned fearfully, tears wetted the cushions of the high sleeper, who was obviously frightened by terrible dream images. Flushed with the reddish rays of the traffic light, Equitius, resting his head in his hand, sat beside Valentinian's bed, anxiously watching his feverish emperor.

All at once Valentinian jolted out of his dream, looked around confusedly, pressed his left hand to his shining forehead and made a groaning defensive movement with his right hand.

Equitius had jumped up, seized Caesar's right hand and covered it with kisses and tears. Then he spoke in a soothing tone: "Sublime Caesar, imperial friend! Calm down, take the cooling drink of lemons and oranges mixed with the juice of the raspberry. Too much of misery, too much of horrors you had to see; but calm down! You are heading for new victories. But you need the strengthening sleep. Drink, and let me watch for thee!"

"My good Equitius, I thank thee!" said the emperor languidly. "Soon I shall need thy help no more! O, of the dreadful dream!"

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Equitius trembled; he, too, was a child of his time, he, too, believed in proclamations of fate, he, too, believed in premonitions as steadfastly as the emperor himself. Only with difficulty did the consul manage to control his movement; in a trembling voice he said: "My, exalted Caesar! Tell the dream! Perhaps it is luck that frightened you, for all too often a mirage deceives the true sense."

Then the emperor smiled gloomily, shook his head and said: "I thank thee for the comfort, O friend, but thou art not able to deceive me. So listen then: I dreamed I was walking through the ruins of Carnuntum and saw my broken laurel wreath glowing at the tribunal. Then a matron in widow's garb came striding towards me, she took my hand and said: 'Valentinian! I, your guardian spirit must part from you; farewell! I have been the companion of your life, of your happiness, but from now on the rulers of fate part our ways; farewell!' After this word she turned and left. I begged and pleaded, I, the emperor, wept and wailed, in vain. In the wild pain of separation, the parting woman threw her arms, then she turned to me once more and lifted her veil. I was violently frightened; with a cry of horror I fell to the ground. Justina, my dear wife did it! ⁽¹⁶⁾" Sobs restrained the emperor's fierce words. Equitius was dismayed, confused, he did not know how to give comfort; the dream spoke horribly clearly. But he had to be comforted, the dear friend, and strengthened by sleep. Therefore Equitius urged him once again to take the soothing potion and asked if he could add a sleeping draught to it. The emperor nodded in agreement and emptied the glass. Equitius had collected himself. In an apparently cheerful tone, he said to the emperor, who had sunk languidly back into his pillows: "Hail, my imperial friend! I told you that the dream indicated happiness and glory! So listen, my Caesar, to the interpretation of the dream: Your guardian spirit, you say, was in mourning clothes; but no guardian spirit has ever worn such clothes! It was therefore that unholy spirit of calamity, which took leave of you, forced by the will of the destiny rulers. But after the manner of malicious fiends he still tormented you in parting by frightening you in the form of the noble empress. That he parted in Carnuntum, with glowing laurels, is that not auspicious? No more shall you lose a city, and with your own light shall your fame shine over all the earth! Sleep calmly, my Caesar, your misfortune has taken leave of you! Sleep calmly, my imperial friend, and awake with thy fortune returned!"

"God, the All-merciful, and Christ Jesus, his only Son, grant it! The emperor had spoken this in a dull voice, slurring his words, and had sunk back into the pillows, stunned.

Equitius, however, stood surprised and speechless before his imperial

(16) Ammianus Lib XXX, 5.

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friend. So the emperor was a Christian, he belonged to the sect of the Nazarenes, the Christians! Therefore he kept away from all public sacrifices, he the pontifex maximus of Rome, therefore he mocked the auguratories! He, who was considered to be a free spirit, a despiser of gods, thus belonged to the despised, hated Christians! Therefore he had not performed Equitius' marriage with Swanhild, therefore he had stayed away from the sacral act and only appeared at the wedding feast, therefore he once denied him to swear to Equitius' by the gods and contented himself with the handshake, to which he spoke the words: "It is easy to swear by delusions; shake my hand, Equitius, and pledge your word by yourself, by your honor and by your loyalty to me!" So that was it; the emperor was a Christian!

Equitius had become thoughtful; he was not reassured, as he made himself appear, for he did not believe what he said. He was also puzzled by the emperor's revealed secret. Valentinian, however, slept a peaceful sleep; the soothing potion and like revived hope had done their duty. Late the morning dawned. The red November sun cast its heatless rays on the slumbering emperor. Then he awoke. It seemed as if the dejection of yesterday had given way, but he was pale. An eerie fire glowed from Valentinian's eyes, his hasty speeches and movements betrayed restrained wrathful defiance. He had been struck by his weakness of yesterday, he felt shame for being soft towards Equitius, and he wanted to erase these impressions of weakness. Therefore, he fought down the fatigue that burdened him with iron willpower; he wanted to appear his old self, but he succeeded poorly. He was grumpy and irritable toward everyone, only toward Equitius he was affectionate. The latter guessed the causes of the change and tried to have a soothing effect on the sick emperor.

Valentinian barely allowed himself time to take an early meal, and hastily demanded departure for Bregetium; he was burning with eagerness to reach Acincum, for the preparations for the war of vengeance. Proudly and gloomily he strode out of the Hibernum Castrum; the groom led his steed before him. As usual, he wanted to swing himself freely from the ground into the saddle. But the stallion bristled, flailed and bit, making it impossible for the emperor to mount his steed. Valentinian quivered with rage. The dismayed groom was unable to restrain the steed. In a hoarse voice, the emperor ordered the groom to cut off his right hand on the spot. Equitius and Carcabis, the emperor's equerry, put themselves into the way and begged for mercy for the unfortunate man, but in vain. Only with difficulty did the consul succeed in obtaining a postponement of the punishment. Then Equitius beckoned the wailer to go, for he knew that Valentinian would pardon him as soon as the wrath had passed away. Carcabis, meanwhile, had tamed the stallion, which now allowed

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the emperor to mount without further difficulty. Once Valentinian was seated in the saddle, he showed the foaming animal that he was his master.⁽¹⁷⁾ Now the procession arranged itself for the ride. The Porta Praetoria was reached, Caesar ordered it to be opened. For the sake of good omen, as Equitius promised the Sabarites yesterday, Valentinian wanted to ride out through this gate. But the gate was stuck, it did not move in its hinges, despite the fact that from inside and outside everything was done to push open the gate wings. Debris trickled down, wall debris rumbled with a roar, but the gate could not be turned on its hinges.

Everyone looked anxiously at the pale Caesar. He remained rigid like a statue in front of the closed gate. No one, not even Equitius, was able to persuade him to choose another gate for his departure. In a rage, he ordered the gate to be unhinged or broken down; he wanted to see if he, the emperor, could not defeat a stupid city gate. He was obeyed. With unspeakable effort, one of the gate wings was lifted on its hinges with lifting beams. At last it gave way; screeching, it lifted under falling debris, then staggered and fell. A cheer of joy flashed from the anxious groups of bystanders.

But the jubilation was premature. The falling gate wing got stuck, rumbling wall debris irreparably hindered the exit; nothing was able to clear the street.⁽¹⁸⁾ The people, however, were shaken: "Two bad omens for the ride! Horse and gate; woe to us, woe to Rome!"

Grimly the emperor clenched his fist, sent an angry glance upward, and muttered between gritted teeth, "Yet, Fate, I defy thee, or I am not the emperor!"

Marble pallor covered his face. Trembling in all his limbs, he yanked his steed around and raced at a gallop to the Porta Principalis Sinistra; his entourage behind. There the ride experienced no restraint.

On a sharp ride they raced along by the plains. Only rarely was a rest made, and even then only when the panting horses could go no further. Nevertheless, night had long fallen over the land by the time Arabona was reached. Nothing helped the most eloquent ideas, nothing was granted all the reasons that Equitius brought forward to leave the army here and to take some rest. Valentinian was blind and deaf to all advice, and his irritability was steadily increasing. He had become taciturn. His stern features showed how he defied physical and mental exhaustion with iron willpower, how he subordinated it, as it were, to his command. Equitius watched over his imperial friend with all care and gentleness, but the unbending stubbornness that Valentinian, deceiving himself, took for strength of character, made the consul's best will fruitless. On

(17) Ammianus Lib XXX, 5.

(18) Ammianus Lib XXX, 5.

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the second day after the ride from Sabaria, the emperor entered Bregetium; it was November 11 in the year 375 of our era.

Here Equitius hoped to persuade the emperor to rest longer; but many legations had already awaited the emperor's arrival. It was no longer possible to hide them from Valentinian, for he had already noticed them and ordered their immediate presentation. Concerned, Equitius asked the emperor first to take a rest, to humble the deputations for the next day, but it was in vain; only after their dispatch would he think of rest. Equitius complied with a heavy heart and escorted the emissaries of Syrmium, the emperor's native city, into the hall before the others.

The message that they announced struck the emperor like a blow of a club.

On the same day that the nightmare had made him tremble, an immense thunderstorm had fallen on his hometown of Syrmium, destroying it for the most part. The lightning struck the Hibernum castrum as well as the Praetorium, both government palaces caught fire and burned to the ground. This was not enough.

The storm carried the flames over the frightened city, which was almost completely engulfed in fire; so the municipal palace and most of the forum. Syrmium, which the enemy had spared, the lightning destroyed. ⁽¹⁹⁾ "Signs and wonders are happening! Lord, let the trial pass my head!" said the emperor sadly, and then dismissed the envoys with the consoling promise to do his best to restore his father city to its former glory.

After the envoys of Syrmium had left the emperor, the consul led the envoys of the German king - as usual there were twelve of them - into the hall. Aistmuth, the Burgrave at the Stone Castle, was their guide.

With a hasty, irregular step, the emperor crossed the chamber. Confidently the Teutons stood before the emperor, but bowed before the lord of the world and awaited his address, as custom demanded. Valentinian did not return the greeting. Blushes of anger flashed across his face, his breath caught. Equitius tried in vain to calm the emperor. The emperor, however, scowling, pushed the consul, who wanted to appease him, aside, stepped in front of Aistmuth, stomped grimly on the ground and raged at him: "I should chase you across the Danubius like shabby dogs, you murdering and robbing companions! But I long to hear what lies you intend to give for your excuse. Speak, you scoundrels!"

"You are mistaken, Emperor!" Aistmuth replied, agitated, but controlling himself. "You were reported to falsely! We are not Sarmatian slaves, no voivode has sent us! The German king, Austrorand-Wurmbrand, is our patron! He does not need to excuse the holy war of revenge, he does not need to excuse his victories before you. In Your name, Caesar Valentinian, our peace was broken,

(19) Ammianus Lib XXX, 5.

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in Your name castles and roads were built on our sacred heritage, in Your name our complaints were rejected, in Your name, Emperor, the right of hospitality was disgracefully violated by Gambin's assassination! Consider all this, Emperor, and you will know who has to make excuses, you or us. You denied us satisfaction, so we took it ourselves; and our good swords helped us to it. We punished the wrongdoers; now we are satisfied and awaited Your return. If you want peace, we are ready to make it; if you want war, you can have that too. Choose!"

Valentinian had at first continued his walk through the hall; but soon he had stopped, astonished, indignant at the boldness of Aistmuth's language. He folded his arms, pinched his lips together, a hoarse laugh rumbled from his throat, and in a trembling, scornful voice he cried, "You have been intoxicated by stolen wine! You think you can frighten me! But now know that I myself am going across the Danubius to subdue you, you murderous scavengers of bewitched she-bears!"

Then Aistmuth's eyes flamed angrily, his weapons rattled wildly, he thrust his shield booming to the ground and stamped his foot grimly. But in a thunderous voice he shouted to the emperor:

"Revoke, Caesar, revoke this word! No noble Merovingian will allow such opprobrium to be heaped upon him! Know, Caesar, that our ancestors⁽²⁰⁾ are older and nobler than yours, and the ropes that twisted them wound with fire around the whole earth in the wild air! Already in the great Alexander's army our ancestors fought and half the world trembled before them. Then they came to Germania and formed the nobility and the tribal kings of all Germanic peoples. All of us who wear untrimmed head hair are from the god tribe of the Merovingians, from the old god tribe that Wuotan himself rejuvenates from time to time, and all of us, like Gambin or King Austrorand, all of us are nobility! Therefore, thou roper's son, take back thy invective, or you shall be forced to repent!"

Incensed, Aistmuth stood before the pale emperor, trembling with rage,

(20) Sachsenspiegel. - Merovingians is not a family name, but a folk name and synonymous with Markomanen, Marchmänner = horse men, riders, knights. (March, Mähre, horse; therefore Moravia, March, Marchfeld.) The two first tribes of the Germanic tribes, which already in Asia always appeared together, were the mounted Saxons and the Swabians fighting on foot, who were called by their "Framaes" the "frumben" (not frommen) Lanzknechte. Therefore, the Germanic army has been made up of knights and lancers, cavalry and infantry since ancient times. The insignia of the Saxon horsemen was the double axe, which misunderstood became the heraldic lily, the coat of arms of the French Merovingians. The Saxons held all European thrones after the fall of Rome, but almost universally perished by corruption outside Germany. The bodyguards of the emperors of Byzantium, the Varangians, were also armed with such double axes (the Saxons) and were originally certainly composed of Saxons. A side piece to this are the so-called Swiss Guards. Meaning, of course, all the Saxons, not the people so called today.

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who stomped his foot furiously, but was unable to utter a word.

Revoke the insult, you ropemaker's son!" cried Aistmuth again, beside himself with rage. Then Valentinian's face reddened ever more deeply, his eyes came rolling wildly out of their sockets, his clenched fists shook in the air, a whimpering howl of rage came from his throat, which was now followed by rasping gurgling sounds. Still the emperor stood grimly facing the envoy of the King of the Germans. Suddenly a stream of blood shot from the mouth of the emperor, and silently he fell down as a corpse at Aistmuth's feet. ⁽²¹⁾

Paralyzed by shock, the Germans stood before the dead emperor. Then they silently departed and immediately rode home. Equitius picked up his imperial friend, carried him to the bedchamber and tried to call him back to life; but Valentinian was dead.

His guardian spirit had left him and his kingdom.

(21) Ammianus Lib XXX, 5.

Chapter 22

Solstice

A year had passed since Carnuntum burned. Unusually joyful life moved Stilifrida. The young people adorned the city with floral garlands and fresh forest greenery, the fathers of the houses dragged heavy tree trunks to the marketplace, for tomorrow the solstice fire was to blaze. The housewives also had many troubles, many worries, and not the least was how the "Sonnwendbretzen" would succeed. The solstice pretzel was for the summer solstice what the doughnut was for the winter solstice, the noblest of the sacrificial pastries. It represented the sun wheel itself. But the pretzels had to be ready before the hearth fires were extinguished, which had now burned continuously for a whole year, because tomorrow they were to be rekindled by the newborn flame. There was plenty to do.

Yes, tomorrow the festival of the solstice was to be celebrated, the festival of cheerfulness and hope, albeit a festival of mourning for Balder, who had been shot. But the Teutons were not yet gloomy fools at that time. They knew that Balder would be reborn, they knew that the good and true could be temporarily suppressed, but never perish, and therefore the festival of mourning had become a festival of hopefulness. -

Near the town pond, the woodpile was piled up; nearby, the wainwright, the carpenter and the blacksmith had joined forces to make the device for making fire. It was a mighty wheel with nine spindles, made of nine kinds of wood, on a fixed axle. Running between two axle bearings, it produced fire by friction. It was still awaiting completion.

The carpenter, Master Holmbert, had delivered the two elm trees and the ash shaft; the former was to form the axle bearings, the latter the axle. This one

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was particularly beautiful. More than a man's length, more than the thickness of a man's thigh, the axle roller was smooth as polished; only the two blunt-tipped ends were rough and fibrous. These had to be heated in the tapholes of the two elms by rapidly turning them over, rubbing them until they reached the heat of the fire.

"What a splendid Ash-block!" exclaimed delighted Master Raffo to the carpenter Holmbert, who felt not a little flattered by the praise. "Dry as bleached jawbones on the gallows!" cried the wainwright delightedly, and continued, "Burn thou as proud as Carnunt! Come hither, my lad, now thou shalt be tapped!"

The carpenter and Strangolf the blacksmith and freeman, held the roller while the wainwright mortised the nine spoke holes. The carpenter, however, said: "King Gambin cut this down himself, when we were building the catapults. The other part helped to break down the gates of Carnuntum. I knew you would like it, the Ash-block!"

Then Master Raffo fitted the first spoke into the shaft. It was carved from oak wood in the shape of a huge spindle. Caressing it, the wainwright touched it, then asked, "Where did you get that?" A mischievous smile was around his wide mouth; it was directed at Holmbert and seemed to say that carpenters were not the only ones to come up with good thoughts. Then he placed the spoke in one of the nine mortises and wedged it tight. Holmbert and Strangolf were unable to answer the question; they had always failed.

"Is the riddle too hard for you?" said Raffo, stretching to let his back rest from standing bent.

"So it was a lightning oak!" said Strangolf.

"Right and yet wrong!" replied the wainwright. "An oak it was, the lightning struck it, but the oak was called Porta Praetoria and the lightning was called the King's Speech!" Master Raffo laughed wildly.

"Haiö!" cried the others delightedly. "Will she hasten to burn, that she may soon join her clan! Hoihö!"

The second spindle spoke was now tapped by the wainwright; it was ash.

"It awakens other memories in you than of the forest in which it was planted! Haiö, Raffo, what is this? Your eye grows moist?" cried the carpenter in amazement.

"How splendid it was!" said Raffo.

"Who, the tree?" asked the others.

"More Romans hath no man speared than Duke Suntarolt's ashen spear shaft; a fragment of it have I saved," said the wainwright in a soft voice; the others were moved to silence.

"And this birch spindle?" asked the carpenter, adding, "No Solstice ever saw such a wheel!"

"The birch?" cried the wainwright, laughing wildly as he wedged it into the

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third mortise. "It won't get dizzy; it's already used to turning! It was stuck in one of the wheels of the triumphal chariot on which we led the howling Proconsul to the forum to meet his emperor, so that he could see his accomplices once again!"

Then they all laughed grimly, but the freeman shouted: "Raffo is a splendid rascal! If the wheel should not give a happy year, a blessed hearth fire, then the end of all things would have come, the dawn of the gods!"

"And what kind of fruit did this fir bear?" asked the freeman. "Nothing less than a gallows it may have been!"

"That's true!" said Master Raffo with a touch of derision. "But I am surprised that it is not known to you. Who then, but you yourself, consecrated to the Hangatyr on it, the treacherous Sarmatian duke Carimslav?"

"Wurmbrand is a king such as I have seldom seen before!" cried the carpenter admiringly. "What patience, what moderation he showed towards the Sarmatians, no means was left untried to induce them to fulfill the oath of covenant, he was as willing to sacrifice as he was indulgent; - all in vain. The hordes became bolder and bolder. When all else failed, he hanged Carimslav, which had an effect. Now the Slavs followed like hounds, no one thought of breaking the covenant!"

The wheel grew until Strangolf, the blacksmith, put an iron ring around it. He claimed that it was from the porticulis of the Porta Praetoria of Carnuntum, but it may be assumed that Master Strangolf did not want to be inferior.

In the high seat of the king's office of the Palace at Stilfrida sat Frau Gotelind under crown in the royal ornament of the Marcomans and Quads, girded with the king's sword, the lion's cloak around her shoulders; but on the back of the high seat shone Gambin's shield as king of the Marcomans and Quads. She had delivered the Wuotan Crown to King Austrorand before Carnuntum. On her right sat Queen Gisalhild, on her left Randmar, Duke of the Marcoman and Quads.

A train of silent grief and mild surrender shadowed the expressions of the rapidly aging queen, for the smile that should have lit her brows was a forced one. But Gisa's heart was also troubled. She might have rejoiced like the lark, and yet the near parting from her mother made her sad. This alternation of feelings was reflected in her face, which sometimes smiled cheerfully, sometimes looked dreamily across the hall to the courtyard, because the longed-for one had not yet appeared. It resembled the changing early spring sky, which gives sunshine and rain in one and the same minute.

The duties of the men's mistresses did not leave time for the two queens to indulge in the play of their thoughts. They had to welcome the guests, who were streaming in ever greater numbers through the courtyard to the hall. Duke Randmar helped in this task, but the queens had to have words of welcome ready for each guest. Randmar had become duke after Suntarolt's fall,

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since it was not a woman's business to lead an army. Nevertheless, this dignity had made little difference to his position in the royal court. He was too modest and Queen Gotelind too clever for it to have been possible for him to arrogate to himself royal rights by exceeding the limits of his effectiveness. Moreover, he was too happy to scheme in such ways, for today he should also receive the hand of Adaluna. There was to be a double wedding.

There the king of the Alemanni entered the hall with some knights. His stately retinue had taken up camp at the foot of the castle hill, next to that of other princes and lords, where theirs was royally tended.

"High queen of the Marchmen and Quads!" he greeted Frau Gotelind; "No one better could the noble Gambin have left his high seat to than you! You are not a woman, but a hero! What high courage animated thee, when thou didst kindle the Kraiaen fires, when thou didst lead the revengeful hosts to Carnuntum, holding the dead king in thy arms!"

With a forced smile, Frau Gotelind said, "I thank you for the praise, Aleman! But it is more due to my friends than to me. It is only hard for me to know how to thank Wuotan, the father of the gods, who begrudged me my husband out of his love for my noble Gambin. It is twice as hard for me when I see you here, who escaped greater danger more happily than Gambin!"

Frau Gotelind could only with difficulty restrain her tears. Then Gisalhild thought to give the conversation another turn and asked: "Announce it to me, king of the Alemanni, how you escaped from death or captivity?"

"I will gladly announce it to you, King's Bride!" said the Alemannic King, after he had sat down in the same place he always occupied when he was guesting in the King's Hall.

He did a real Alemanian deep drink and began the speech:

"It is a long story and it happened like this: At the same time that the German king was being killed, I was standing with my Alemanni and Swabians on the Rhine, fighting with the Romans. Many a message went and came between us with useless verbiage. But I knew the Roman's cunning and foresaw myself; every raid had failed. This angered the rope maker's son not a little. He thought of betrayal and wanted to do to me what he had done to Gambin. In Rome it may be true that when the head falls, the masterless people is a lifeless trunk; with us this is not true; you yourself have shown them that, Queen of the Quads! Then the old fox invited me to a parley; everyone was to appear in the square, accompanied by only three horsemen. He believed me to be at a disadvantage, for at my back lay a wide wooded swamp. We met, negotiated and - he approved everything! That was his way, I knew it well, but I did not let him notice it. He soon left me. Then I saw how small Roman horsemen passed through the area in front of me, through which my way to the army should lead. Now I retreated as far as I could into the swamp forest to keep an eye out for the scouts. Then I sent a horseman to the next town, ordering lodging for me and a larger band of horsemen, and I told him the destination and direction

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of the train. He trotted away. He was deceived in order to deceive. I did the same with each of the other two riders. Each took a different road. When all were gone, I fled through the forest to my own; thus I escaped death or imprisonment!"

The Alemanni happily emptied his drinking horn, but Queen Gisalhild said:

"This flight brings you benefit and glory like a battle won; much of the calamity you have thereby spared your people."

"The murder of Witicho, the king of the Alemanni, was of little use to the Romans before you, Makrian, and one would think that they would now know that regicide is far from genocide. But therein lies the rub; Rome is dangerous only by her intrigues, not by her weapons. How efficiently King Wurmbrand has shown them the way home! Hoihö! Merobandes was over in Bregetium before he thought he was in Germania. One cannot speak of a battle, that was only a Roman hunt. I still see the puffed-up Merobandes as he crossed the bridge at Bregetium over the Danube and shyly avoided the Komornerburg. I stood next to Burgrave Ruodegar at the rampart. We calmly let him go; he took that for fear. A few poorly armed people were thrown at him, they fled, of course, and the bawler cried victory and moved on; into the trap. This was planned. Suddenly he was standing in the valley of the Wahagaha, there where it narrows between steep mountains, where mountain forests laid the way for the army. There soon right, soon left, soon in front, soon behind, soon everywhere at the same time Wurmbrand's army showed, there the Roman sat in a bath of fear. Hoihö, that was wonderful! Once they let him break through the ring for a sham; again he shouted victory. But it didn't last long, because we stayed on his trail; then the Roman hunt began. Hoihö, on and on! All around, our hordes broke out on the hunted enemies; they fled to Bregetium as long as their bows held out, and when they could no longer hold out, they ran barefoot and naked as the day they were born. But the road was no longer as it had been when they came. Ruodegar, the Komorner, had built pitfalls and ditches in the Romans' backs. Many a Roman fell to his death, many another found himself caught like prey. Hoihö, how they howled and wriggled there! Meroband's legion grew smaller and smaller, almost unworthy of hunting. He thought that the blue river in front of him was the Danube, but it was the Komorno people. Then he came right into the hail cloud. From one corner of the valley he ran to the other, scattered in small heaps, all order had ceased; even individually the Romans were running around like threads in a ball. Then he had caught his breath somewhere and rode straight into the Danube without first building a bridge. Miserably, only a few hundred men strong, he came home to Bregetium. He was probably the last Roman we saw over there. They must have received him beautifully in Rome; I'd like to know how many rods they cut on his back! Hoihö, long I still think of the joys of the Roman hunt!"

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"Roman murder and holy fire!" cried Duke Randmar, laughing. "Hais! Thuringian count, you are greatly mistaken! Things are different in Rome than you honest men thought on your Schauenstein! But how it looks there now, none of you many guests may know. Only last week I returned from Rome with the noble Count Aismuth von Putene (1); we had been on an errand ourselves with Count Thurso von Rauhenstein.

"Tell me, Duke!" shouted from all sides with the sound of a drinking horn.

The Duke began: "The losses for Rome, which Valentinian had broken off on the Rhine and on the Danube, had been grievous enough. The emperor died; his adult son Caesar Gratian was destined to succeed him, but was not present at his father's death. In the confusion of the first moments, in Bregetium Valentinian the child (2), Caesar's second born, was proclaimed Emperor Augustus. There was nothing to be done about it; Caesar Gratian complied and now leads a guardianship together with Equitius. Both now also held the consulship together. In Rome, turmoil was looming. The provinces were difficult, federal peoples were falling away, others were declaring war, and the only one who could have turned this doom, Equitius, had no army! How easily he could have become Caesar, but he still kept faith with his dead friend beyond the grave; he is more than a Roman, he is a man! But what does Equitius, the clever one, do? - Listen and marvel! - With mastery he deceives the Romans; by brilliant feasts he lulls them to sleep and deceives them about the danger; they rejoice and are calm. In silence, however, he prepares a terribly large army, which he trains efficiently; it seems as if the legions grow on trees. We have slain more than a hundred thousand Romans, and already a double-sized army stands on its feet, almost complete. But it is not yet battle-ready. Here comes the destroyed Meroband. What does Equitius do? Quickly Germanic slaves and slave girls are brought up, dressed up like captured kings and princesses, booty is also hastily acquired, and - what do you high lords think? - Meroband enters Rome as triumphant, as conqueror, as annihilator of the Germans!"

Shouts of indignation interrupted the narrator, but he continued:

"You are mistaken, high sirs! This is not an idle game, this is great wisdom. Listen further! Already the apostate peoples of the Confederation have returned to order without a stroke of the sword for fear of the mighty Germanic conqueror Meroband. If we did not have the king Wurmbrand, we would have reason to fear Equitius. You see, high lords, how a sick people must honor even men like a Meroband to be able to deceive themselves about their own weakness."

This led to many a discussion and argument, until Rudolf the Count of

(1) Today Pütten near Wiener Neustadt.

(2) "Valentinian II" was only four years old at the time.

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Hesse raised this question: "We had to hear more than miraculous things. But the most wonderful thing seems to me that you, Duke, have named counts who are still unknown to me. Whose lineage, where are their peoples, where do their castles stand?"

The duke answered: "I will gladly answer your question, as far as it is clear to me. Much of it is a mystery to me, who has been present almost everywhere. Suddenly twelve new counties were created, eleven new counts sit in the castles, but where the counts come from, I do not know. All eleven of them were Erchantaug's spy-like retinue. Now they are King Wurmbrand's paladins, and like him, they have done all the unearthly things. Erchantaug was Wuotan himself; but his son can be none other than also Wuotan in rejuvenated form. For no one, not even the queen Gisalhild, has seen both at the same time. The eleven, however, remained the same as they were under Erchantaug, so they must be Wuotan's humanized Aesir and Vanir. That is all I can say. They seem to be called to give mighty kotings to the Germans as a shield against Rome, mighty pillars of future world domination of the Germans. But now listen further! You know that King Wurmbrand of Carnuntum is building his new palace; you know his newly acquired kingdom, the Ostarland. This is well secured by the twelve border counties, which are still unknown to you, Count of Hesse. The first of these twelve count's castles, "Chogilobrunna" (3) on the Irminskogel, stands under Count Teutomar's umbrella. The next one is that of Count Bruno von Rodaun, then follows Azzo's castle Medelick (4), after that as fourth Thursos Count's castle Rauhenstein ob Padun (5), where the Roman withers in Aquae. Now the other counties follow in a wide arc up to the Stone Castle, the newly won land Friedent, in this sequence: Count Petzo sits on Pottenstein, Count Konrad on Starhemberg, now follows the county Wurmbrand, which King Austrorand reserved for himself and called after his name. This is followed by Lambrecht's county of Stüchsenstein, to which the important castle of Count Kuno is attached; it blocks the road over the Simitirich to Rome via Aquileia. Count Aistmuth covers her back on Putene against Pannonia. Now comes again the northern course the counties of Manfred zu Pottendorf and Utilos zu Trautmannstorff, which latter borders on the royal Stone Palace. Each of these eleven now has a handsome retinue of second-born, old noble, Merovingian-Saxon stock, which joined them in the last Roman campaign, and these too were gifted with proud castles, which arise in stately numbers next to the rulers' seats, promising the country protection from the Roman. Thus Waldegg, Landegg, Thernberg, Seebenstein, Stuppach and many others were built. The eleven paladins, however, were gifted by King

(3) Lost; on the Hermannskogel near Vienna.

(4) Medling.

(5) Baden.

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Wurmbrand with fabulous riches, such as no king possesses. The most marvelous of these, however, are their stately herds of gold-horned bulls and cows of enormous size, such as no one has ever seen before. This is not all that King Wurmbrand has done; listen further! As far as Aquileia, there are many colonies of Quads along the road, well hidden in forest valleys, which King Wurmbrand left there on his last campaign in order to secure the road to Aquileia and thus to Rome for himself and his successors. Horses are bred there, weapons are forged and food is stored so that future army journeys will find points of support and rest. The most important of these points is Gotschee (6) in Illyricum. There sits Duke Radbod, to whom all the other castles of the long chain are subject, but who himself only receives orders directly from King Wurmbrand and is otherwise not a servant. King Wurmbrand has created this and much more in barely a year's time, without advice or question. Now say, lords, can he be a man of flesh and blood like you, or do not these deeds clearly show that he is a god?"

Duke Randmar was silent. Satisfied with the effect of his speech, he let the contents of his mead horn slowly slide down his throat in proud self-confidence. As if crushed by the force of the unimagined in Randmar's announcement, the high lords sat speechless in the ring with astonished gestures. All this had happened without the Reichstag, without their advice, without their permission, and yet no one could find fault with it. Randmar was only half aware of the effect of his word; still there was silence all around. The high lords felt the mighty hand in which the imperial sword lay, and were too dismayed at this perception to regain thought and speech at once. Randmar was about to proceed to proclaim more of the glories of King Wurmbrand, when joyous bugle calls boomed in through the courtyard. The people's shouts of joy were also heard: "Hail to the German king, hail to the bride and groom Austrorand and Gisalhild! Hail, hail!"

The queens jumped up jubilantly and hurried to meet the approaching king, whose knightly figure was now visible in the courtyard. He was adorned with the insignia of the German royal dignity; the eleven paladins followed him.

That tipped the scales. The queens had previously gloated over the unplanned impression that Randmar's word had made on the little German autocrats. They had warmly grudged it to them: they knew only too well that it was they who had made the burden of the Wuotan crown almost unbearable for the dead king. But now he himself had appeared; he, the great one, without

(6) This chain of castles to Aquileia is not an idle game of imagination; it is anthropologically as well as ethnographically proven. Analogous examples can be found on all the other four Roman roads across the Alps. They found their emergence in the period of the migration of peoples, this so thoroughly misunderstood development period of the Germans.

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suspecting how Randmar had unconsciously guided the minds of the little ones. All of them had jumped up; the people's shout of joy, the cheerful roar of the army horns, the bright joy of the queens, all this had unconsciously carried away the astonished ones. The proud, jealous little ones, who would have hesitated with thoughtful consideration, perhaps even withdrawn with a grudge to devise destruction for the one so superior to them, these same ones, swept away by the general jubilation, now hurried to meet the one who had entered and paid homage to him in a disorderly group on their knees.

King Wurmbrand stood there with self-confident dignity, Erchantaug's white ravens fluttered around his crowned head. At first he seemed astonished by the unexpected homage, but he did not let it show and accepted it as a matter of course. Thus he spoke the proud greeting: "Take the King of German Kings' greeting, you kings, princes and lords! My greeting brings you peace for the empire, it brings as first gift to the Germans an open road through the girdle of Rome straight into the city of Rome itself."

This powerful royal greeting ignited; enthusiastically, still kneeling, the Alemanni shouted: "Hail to you, the savior and liberator of the Germans, hail to you, the second Hermann, hail to you, the chief king of the Germans, hail to our king Austrorand-Wurmbrand, hail!"

Then all joined in vigorously and with sword and shield booming they applauded; and whoever was able to force his way through to Wurmbrand, embraced him stormily.

Finally, the lovers greeted each other. They held each other in a happy embrace for a long time, but neither of them found words; what their hearts had to say to each other could do without spoken words.

A rarely heard sound now struck everyone's ear. It was the peculiarly solemn roar of the ore basin from the Hechsa tower. The queens were frightened; it brought back memories of that stormy night in which the dead king had returned home. Austrorand, too, looked around disconcerted. An anxious, silent silence hovered over the assembly. From outside, the solemn sound of brass resounded. But other sounds, like the roar of a swarm of bees, were also audible. Now it came closer with buzzing, already it seemed to fill the courtyard of the castle. This was the voice of the people, but not a joyful shout of joy, nor the expression of horror; it was the expression of shy reverence that no loud word dares to offer. But that which intimidated the people, which made the ore basin roar, that was also the rarest event, such as hardly the elders of old ever saw.

A strange procession moved in through the Horse Gate. Ahead on white horses rode six Wala maidens in splendid armor; floral decorations announced the peaceful intention of the ride. Behind them, also on flower-decorated white steeds, white-veiled half-dressed women rode along, mistletoe wreaths around their heads. If the people were already afraid of these wise women, who sat first in the judgment seat of the gods, they sank into the dust when they saw

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the chariot drawn by white oxen. This was the aged Albruna of Stronegg. More Wala maidens closed the train. Led by the wise women, the bent Albruna entered the high hall. Nobody knew the reason of her coming. Frau Gotelind offered the venerable one a throne' seat; in front of it she stood in the ring of her wives and looked around with solemn seriousness.

King Austrorand was the only one who knew the venerable one; it was also he whom her inquiring eye sought. Now he rushed forward joyfully moved, willing to throw himself before the grasping priestess, but a hint from her was enough to remind him that there, where everyone else lay in the dust, he had to have the pride to stand with his head high. So he walked towards her with a measured and proud step. When he had reached the center of the hall, surrounded by his paladins, Albruna went to meet him and, having reached him, bent her knee. As if enraptured, she looked him in the eye, then she spoke:

"Take greeting from Albruna, you reborn Balder, you first of the dragon fire, you mightiest of the German kings! Greetings to you and your noble bride! Until the gods dawn, the Wurmbrand blooms under Wuotan's crown, so spells Allfather's fate. Rome is weakened, its power broken, but to kill it, that is denied to the victorious Aesir, that is therefore also denied to you by fate. Thus it stands with flame runes since the beginning of the times unchangeably in the conclusion of the fate. Therefore keep faithful watch, you Dragonbrand, keep faithful watch, you Germans! Rome grows old; shield and sword sink from the trembling arm of an old woman. Then the German king wraps the laurel of Caesar around his head, now Caesar himself! Then keep faithful watch, you Dragonbrand, keep faithful watch, you Germans! For now Rome comes staggering down the Alpine paths in her penitential robe, seemingly powerless, a beggar, but it is deceptive! Then, you Dragonbrand, keep faithful watch! Remember! Balder, who gladly vanquished the Lintworm, he fell to the same enemy, who grew old and weak, who blindly sent after him with trembling hand the Mistletoe. Thus you conquered the Lindwurm Rome, and Wurmbrand was your name. Therefore beware, you Dragonbrand, of the Mistletoe of Rome! Keep faithful watch, you Wurmbrand, keep faithful watch, you Germans! Remember this, pass it on from child to grandchild and grandchild!"

Albruna rose with difficulty, but she did not sit down. Standing in front of the pews, she took Austrorand's and Gisa's hands and put them together. Until now, Albruna had heroically fought down her heart's excitement and spoken with dignity in a firm voice. Now she softened, barely able to restrain her tears. With trembling voice she spoke to Wurmbrand: "Incarnate son of Wuotan, as you took the word of warning from me, so take from my hands Gisa, your bride! Receive her, like the German crown, as the crown jewel of German virgins! Carry in joy and sorrow your divine-royal destiny!"

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But then Albruna's strength was broken, she felt only the mother's heart beating in her bosom and, sobbing loudly, sank to her son's breast, who lay unconsciously on his mother's bosom.

For a long time, the two held each other like this. At last she tore herself away from her son's heart, for the king was not allowed to know that she had given him life; he was not allowed to suspect that she had prepared for him the paths, hidden the giddy depths of the abysses over which he had climbed to the heights with his eyes blinded by dreams. The great work was done, her atonement accomplished. Now their mission was accomplished. Now she wanted to go to Fraya's hall, Fensalir, to watch over the prosperity of Wurmbrand's borders. But she could reach there only by courageous self-sacrifice; she was ready for it. After her return home, she wanted to throw herself into Urda's well, consecrating herself to the goddess with Azzo's skull cup. She knew that now she would see her son's eye shining for the last time. It took her breath away. Once more she embraced Austrorand, then Gisa, then she staggered out of the hall. Her train left Stilifrida as it had come.

With the last ray of the sinking sun all fire had been extinguished; Balder had died. Magic candles brightened the marketplace; Balder's Toast was drunk. Creaking and groaning the mighty solstice wheel turned, which was called to give birth to the new fire. Frau Gotelind and her guests were seated around the creaking wheel.

Then the guilds, led by Notger, the town elder, came and brought the queen the gifts that were due to her at each of the three holy times.

Then the feast began. Cheerful dance songs resounded and whirling the couples flew around the groaning wheel. But first of all Wurmbrand jumped with Gisa as joyfully as if he had never sat under a crown.

Already the morning dawned. Then his little clouds of smoke began to curl up from the wheel's axle bearings. Now it was quiet all around; everyone wanted to see the birth of the sacred fire. Now the first sparks flew up, and the glow rising, the crackling followed by hesitant flames, then the two elms stood in the fire. Cheerful "Hoihö, Feuerjo!" roared through the crowd. Quickly the wheel was lifted out of the axle bearings, but the burning elm poles were placed on the woodpile, which soon burned ablaze. Then the sun rose mightily in the east above the distant mountains. Loud cheering broke out. The drinking horns were filled anew, rubbed on the ground with a loud noise, then emptied, lifted toward the sun, and pushed back to the ground with a thud. Now they brought their friends the Minnetrunk, new friendships were made at Balder's Toast, old enmities were erased. Thereupon the dance began anew, and that all the more.

The solstice wheel was now quickly wrapped with straw, then doused with pitch and rolled burning from the ramparts down to the Moravia river. Hey, how happily it ran towards the sun! Now it reached the shore, and now it flew with beautiful momentum into the river. It hissed, but a good part burned away

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unquenched. Burning it drifted away, burning it still disappeared from the looking eye. This good foreshadowing was greeted with jubilation by the people.

Mightily the Solstice bonfire ("Sonnwendhahn") (7) blazed in full glow, the queen distributed the pretzels to her guests, and then the actual Solstice dance began.

Then Wurmbrand took his Gisa in his arms and led her in the whirling round dance three times, faster and faster around the flaming sun, then he swung himself up from the ground with her in a powerful jump - a cry of admiration ran through the crowd - and disappeared with her in the flames. Like two unearthly beings, both flew through the blaze and reached the ground again without sinking, in order to circle the solstice fire three times again. No one had ever seen such a solstice leap. Only a son of the sun could dare such a feat; no one doubted the divinity of the bride and groom.

Now the fires were lit under the brew kettles and roasting spits in the marketplace, for the wedding of the king's daughter had given the queen the opportunity to entertain the people of St. Ilfrida. The housewives, however, the guardians of the "hearth of sacred flame" carried fires from the Sonnwendhahn to the hearths of their houses to light the new hearth fires while saying blessings. The fathers of the houses, meanwhile, threw coal residues from the solstice fire onto the house roofs to protect them from lightning strikes. Frau Gotelinde lit the fire in the castle kitchen herself, but the solstice charcoal was thrown onto the castle roof by her housemaster. King Wurmbrand also gave his bride a firebrand; she was to tend it and use it to light the hearth fire in the new castle, Burg am Stein.

Soon this was done. Again, everything was gathered on the fairground, because the crown of the festival, the Dragon's Bite (8) should begin.

Endless cheers of the people shook the air. The procession approached; horn blowers and pipers in front. Now came a hideous monster of painted canvas stretched over wooden hoops with its jaws wide open; it was supposed to represent the dragon. Two of Strangolf's servants were hidden inside and guided the deformed sculpture's course and movement. Everyone marveled at Strangolf's masterpiece. But when the dragon monstrosity moved its front part

(7) Even today, the farmer, especially the alpine hunter, calls every outdoor fire around which he camps a "rooster". One thinks of the threatening word: To put someone the red cock on the roof, as well as of the three cocks of German god myths.

(8) Also this was one of those mystery plays, which were numerous and - even if corrupted - still exist. It is to be reminded of what the note in chapter 20, Urdas Riegel (p. 406) says. Only this genre was not corrupted like those. Such mystery plays existed in all holy times, and still exist today; so the Drachenstich at Fürth in Bavaria; the Anklopffel in the Tyrolean Zillertal; the Weihnacht play in Styria and many, many others. Of course, today they are all with Christian tendency, but the ancient mythical background is easy to recognize.

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and gaped open, as if it wanted to swallow Stilfrida whole, then one knew that this should be the head and was almost beside oneself with admiration.

Behind the monster walked the goddess Nana and her night-walker, showing signs of terror and supreme fear. These were Adaluna and Seburga; it was considered a high honor to play the role of goddesses at such festivals. For like the ancient Greeks, the ancient Teutons also presented the life and work of their gods vividly to the people; only rougher in form, but no less true and profound in spirit. Behind them rode Balder, whom Duke Randmar played and did himself no small credit on this honor.

Now the pipers formed up behind the Godpole; there sat down also the goddess Nana and her night representative. They wringed their hands and pretended to cry.

Dense crowds of people surrounded the tree, and quite timidly the hopeful youth of the royal city brought themselves forward. But when the dragon beast ran wildly around, the city defenders of the future felt no small desire to fight the creature. But the dragon knew how to have fun; he opened wide the mouth that was supposed to be the maw, and the heroes of the future ran away screaming, so that one fell over the other to the great laughter of those who had done the same in their youth. But the hunt for the boys gave the dragon little pleasure; to keep them away, he calmly left to the bullwhip of Master Strangolf. He was mostly interested in the young maidens, who seemed to be a special pleasure to him to grab by the robe or the calves. If he had caught one, then he held her securely, she could scream as much as she wanted, only a little kiss given to Master Strangolf could loosen her. That's how the dragon monster did it for a short time. At last the dragon seemed to calm down; he stood still, in defiance of all the teasing, like a wise man who was high above the petty hustle and bustle of the world. It was not clearly discernible whether Strangolf's masterpiece was asleep or brooding over further evil. The two goddesses, however, began to wail and lament anew.

Then silence fell, for now the game began. Balder came sprinting up and let himself be admired as a bold rider. Then he spoke to Nana:

*"Greetings to you, my fair maiden,
What brings you here on this stone?
Do you complain? Why? Tell me!
The Aesir Balder stands before you!"*

Nana answered:
*"Ah, noble, faithful God of the Aesir
I show you my distress and suffering;
I am waiting here in fear of the dragon,
Whose fury will vanquish me."*

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Then Balder said:

*"Take heart, fair maiden!
The dragon is strangled by my balm;
Call thy name, fair child!
For know that I am faithful to thee."*

Nana spoke against it:

*"Alas, noble faithful god-hero,
Flee quickly out into the wide field!
Otherwise you would have to give up your heroic life
Like Nana given to death."*

Balder replied:

*"So hear me, fair Nana:
The dragon falls by Geresstich;
With sharp sword, with firebrand
I will free Ostarland from him!"*

With this verse, Randmar had allowed himself a deviation from the ancient word order. The reference to Wurmbrand and his bride had not escaped the people; they broke out into tumultuous cheers, which impeded the progress of the play. Only at King Austrorand's beckoning did it become quiet again, so that Nana could do her rebuttal:

*"Look, my dear lord!
The cruel beast is already coming."*

The two goddesses now wrung their arms in despair and wailed loudly. The monster ran grimly at the maidens. Then Balder wrenched his steed around and thrust his lance deep into the monster's throat. A mighty jet of blood sprang forth, well hidden in the dragon's cavity, in a long tube, for the sake of deception. Then the monster sank. The two servants hurried to escape from the hollow space of the monster, for it was no longer quite safe in there. Balder struck the felled dragon beast several more times with his sword, then he turned to Nana:

*"Victory, victory, thou fair Nana mine!
Now you may be fresh and cheerful.
From the dragon you see yourself freed,
Now Balder himself frees thee."*

Then the goddesses showed high joy, and rejoicing Nana flew to her

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savior's breast. This representation filled Nana and Balder with the great truth of life, but still they had to hear many a teasing word after they had returned to the queen. But now Adaluna still had to speak as Nana these closing words:

*"Ah noble, dear Aesir,
You who have felled the dragon.
Take me together with my love,
That is the gain of the hard fight!"*

Balder quickly lifted his Nana onto his steed and sped away with her. The night lady rider hurried to follow the two.

Now the noise really started. Everyone was now scrambling to conquer a handful of bloody earth and a scrap of the dragon; the former was supposed to bless the flax, but the latter was supposed to scare the sparrows. This was a particularly welcome opportunity for the highly praised male youth to exercise boldness and agility. Bloody heads and bruises were easy to come by, but it amused not only the high royal guests but also the people of Stilifrida enormously.

A short time later, a double wedding procession through the Horse Gate moved out to the most sacred Horse Lake. Surrounded by a dense oak forest, a Hutberg rose there, encircled by a ring wall.

The procession was opened by the three healers of Stilifrida, Wolchangard the Hechsa, Trudelinde the Truda and Helwiga the Wala: all three in the richest adornment of their dignity, with burning torches. Behind them walked the two queens, their retinue and the second bride of the day, Adaluna. Two richly harnessed steeds, loaded with weapons and precious equipment, brought up the rear. The one, more splendid, carried Gisalhild's bridal gift, which she had offered King Wurmbrand, and the other was Adaluna's gift for Duke Randmar.

A second procession left the city through the castle gate. In front, carrying torches, walked Master Strangolf with two more sacrificers. Now followed with their followers the two suitors, behind them also two horses with the bride's gifts. There, too, the weapons were not missing, but some jewelry and other female trinkets peeped out from between the weapons. That was the bride purchase, so called from time immemorial, when the man still bought the bride from the father. Now this no longer applied, and the bride purchase had become a gift from the groom to the bride. But in memory of the origin of the custom, horse, sword and shield were still indispensable for the bride's gift, no matter what else it consisted of.

Simultaneously from different sides both trains had reached the Hutberg on the Horse Lake. Without seeing each other, Gisalhild and Austrorand strode up the Hutberg to meet on its top. There the Gothi was already waiting for them in his white festival gown, and handed both a burning torch. These they held now crossed. Strangolf laid the holy sword over the place of crossing and

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tied these three objects together with branches of the Elderbush, the old holy symbol of fertility. He blessed what was thus bound together with the hammer, muttering incantations. Now he pulled the sword out of the bandage of torches. Arm in arm, however, the now married couple, carrying the joined torches together, descended from the Hutberg. There they were surrounded by their friends and called by their conjugal names.

Likewise, Adaluna was married to Duke Randmar. Soon they were sitting at the wedding feast in the royal chamber: Frau Gotelind under the crown, on her right the young royal couple, on her left the newly married ducal couple. True to old custom, two swords were thrust crosswise into the floorboard behind each couple.

Evening had come, and the horses were neighing in the castle courtyard, reminding the young royal couple to ride south. The moon's soft light flashed silver over the ghostly debris of the dead Carnuntum. Then, with glittering arms, a long cavalcade crossed Trajan's Bridge. In front rode a stately royal couple; white ravens circled their crowned heads and white dogs jumped, merrily making noise, in front of them. Up on the stone, however, bright bonfires burned, for the procession of King Wurmbrand and Queen Gisalhild had been recognized by the shine of their arms and coats of arms. Slowly the procession wound its way up to Burg am Stein, that castle, which towered up from the depths of the earth to the heights of the sun, to now receive its crown in Queen Gisalhild.

Queen Gotelind followed them there the next morning with all her guests to celebrate many a merry feast day in the new Burg am Stein to glorify this new fort.

But a strange consecration preceded these feast days.

On the first day after the pompous homecoming of Gisa as wife and queen, King Wurmbrand summoned all his guests in their festive dress to ride out together. Nobody knew where they were heading. In the regalia of the German king, Austrorand rode at the head of the shining royal entourage. To the astonishment of all, they headed straight for the ruins and did not stop until they reached the empty Forum. There a strange group was waiting for the royal procession.

In the middle of the Forum, where the Groma once shone, stood a huge plow, gilded all over, festively decorated with flowers and ribbons. A twelve-horse team of golden-horned bulls, also garlanded with flowers, was harnessed in front. About fifty quarxes surrounded the team. These threw themselves on their knees when they saw the king.

In front of the plow, the king swung himself out of the saddle, seized the implement and plowed a deep furrow from one end of the forum to the other; then he drew a second furrow, crossing this one as well. The bulls were steered by Inwalt, the house mason, with the help of the quarxes.

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But there, where the two furrows crossed, where the groma had stood before, a deep pit was dug by the quarxes. Others killed the twelve bulls. Now the plow with the team was sunk into the pit and the pit was closed again:

Silently the king's guests marveled at what he had done. Now he said: "As Erchantaug vowed, Austrorand has plowed the soil, on which before only Roman vice flourished; in the future, expiatory grain shall sprout from the liberated soil. Urda's tower stands mightily before the gates; this mighty castle guard prevents the Romans from returning. The sunken gold plow with the team, however, will plow sporadically anew, until not one stone of the destroyed city sticks out of the ground".

Before Wurmbrand mounted the steed, he ordered his friend Inwalt to take the ropes from the necks of the quarxes. They did not know what happened to them; their minds were filled with hopeful doubts. Wurmbrand, however, gave them a valley in the county of Wurmbrand, where they were to clear the forest, build huts and cultivate the fields under the supervision of Inwalt, the loyal housekeeper; the necessary livestock was granted to them for this purpose. They were allowed to be human again and had been in the sunken castle for the longest time. The valley in which they lived from then on is called Schrattenthal to this day. The castle, however, which was built there in the forest, was named Schrattenstein.

King Wurmbrand returned with his guests to the new Burg am Stein.

Many a bloody campaign was still ridden out from Burg am Stein, many a merry hawk hunt. The clang of the sword and the call of the horn had been her lullaby, and sword and horn remained her tools in the days of childhood. At last it, too, grew old and deserted. Its inhabitants moved down into the valley and left the old castle to decay. The name has remained to this day, for the market at the foot of the stone still bears the name Altenburg.

There, where Erchantaug's round building stood, the sanctuary of the new castle was built. But when the castle grew old, a band of Waelic men came. They were dressed in brown hooded robes, had old ropes around their waists and were barefoot. They sang foreign tunes; they called it psalmody; but in front of them walked one who carried an image of a man nailed to a crossbar.

The hooded men, however, took possession of Erchantaug's round building without being asked, set up their image of gods in it and called the building a church from then on. So they did, where they could, with all the round buildings in the country. Later these were renewed in stone, and many of them are still standing in the wide Ostarland as well as in the whole of Germany.

Thus, even today, where Erchantaug's round building used to stand, in Deutsch-Altenburg, a beautiful Romanesque rotunda stands as a landmark of

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the passing of time.

But what other fates affected the castle and the country, how the armies of nations passed by to Rome, how the armies of frocks passed by from Rome, and what happened in the process, that, my generous reader, I will tell you another time, if the father of fate does not direct it otherwise.

Guido von List and the School

By Philipp Stauff

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63 Jahrgang

With this letter and seal I wager that most of my honored readers have not yet heard of Guido von List. So I have to introduce the man first. He is a writer in Vienna, according to my estimation in his sixties, and by no means qualified for our proper sciences. So those who like to wait for faculty stamps and such things before they deign to recognize a person have every right to turn up their noses at the fact that I want to tell them something about Guido von List. But whoever attaches some importance to not having been among the short-sighted and small-minded in the judgment of future decades, who will recognize in Guido von List one of the greatest Germans who ever lived: he will take note of this man with great love today. And he will also thank me for having drawn his attention to this important researcher.

Now Guido von List is not a pedagogue at all. In this respect he shares the characteristic of the most eminent pedagogues, that they have not been pedagogues, but that the school must be content to make his valuable intellectual work useful to itself. Whoever dares to undertake this task with respect to Guido von List will face a new world and will do the school a greater service than has ever been done for it since Pestalozzi (1746-1827). And he will also find that he is doing greater service to the teaching profession than all the work ever done by the best champions of education. And he will also find that he has reached a point where a unity is being created between the school and the folk which has never yet been created, and that this lack of unity between school and folk weighs on the value of the teaching profession, and leaves in its wake the terrible problems of public leadership under which not only the teaching profession is groaning.

As you can see, I think much of Guido von List's work. One would therefore have to believe that the official science would already put this man on a palanquin and parade him through the streets praising him. Whoever thinks this way, however, does not know our science and does not know the other side of the so-called German thoroughness: the small-mindedness, the turnip gardening. List is not just any special researcher, but a cultural reformer! Is there perhaps a science in Germany that is called cultural reform? No. Consequently, there is nothing about List. If he had discovered a beetle with nine legs, he would be considered something amazing in Germany. But he did

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not. He rather tore open the entire mental structure of our Germanic ancestors anew, and on the basis of his research results has overturned the tables of proper science. How many dozens of things does proper science say have come to us from the ancient Romans! But it is not true; clever study proves it. Which professor will now let himself be convinced that decades of his busy little digging have been in vain? How many scholars have wept tears of blood every year from the lectern over the barbarism of the ancient Germanic tribes and even tried to excuse the Roman Tacitus with noble exemplary intentions, because he praised the Germanic tribes? Now they are all supposed to relearn? How many scholars of antiquity have sifted and collected the figures of the gods of the ancient Germanic tribes, described them by face and garb, and wittily criticized their effectiveness? Now with the same principles of action, they believe they haven't proven that we do mathematics with figures of "Arabic" origin. No scholar thinks differently and none doubts it. But List shows us how these numbers originated from old-Aryan salvation signs. A man who knocks down everything which previously had validity before in the scholarly utopia will never be recognized by the proper scholarship. Or at best, perhaps in a new generation, when the old ones have died in their chairs....

It would be better for them to approach Guido von List in order to refute him. But this one does not do first of all - because it might be quite difficult. So one rather conceals his findings and lets him lead his work himself according to the well-known advice of Gamaliel in the Bible. But around Guido von List a Society has been formed with the purpose of carrying his works into wider circles, and this society includes a large number of highly educated men (among them also some scholars), people whose names would be recognized. The seat of the society is in Vienna, Bleichergasse 18, and the joining of men who have grasped the sense of List's aspirations and want to work in his sense for the Guido von List Society is desired; however, if possible, no advertising should take place among people who do not possess the necessary ideal spirit or are not even able to follow the thoughts. For the German teachers, however, it is almost a matter of life that they become acquainted with List's work; they have the possibility to work for this in an extensive way and to create for us the generation that should be receptive and mature for Guido von List's high Germanic ideals.

And whoever knows his works and has a sense for observation, wonders will be revealed to his eyes. He will know how to read in houses and churches the sense of old traditions and customs, which we consider superstitious, all is revealed to him; all linguistic wisdom lies open before him and the Grimm's fairy tales grow to undreamed-of significance (I was recently allowed, on request, to interpret the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty for the "Blätter für die Schulpraxis" published in Schwabach and for the 1911 youth calendar of the

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"Vaterländischer Schriftenverband", Berlin W 62, Kleiststr. 3) - in short, it is a kind of new world in which we live.

How did all this come about? Guido List has long been a profound researcher of old Germanic wisdom. But even he had not gotten to the bottom and did not get much further than approximating the world view on which today's liberalism is based. Then, in 1902, fate imposed on him an eleven-month blindness, and during this time of blindness he saw deeper than ever before. For he found that Odin in the mystical Edda poem "Odin's Runatal" explains the meaning of the eighteen original runes, and that these runes were by no means letter signs, but primeval word stems. Through the legibility of these signs everything became clear to him - that which belonged to the spirit world of our ancestors - like the golden key of the fairy tale - doors and gates opened before him. Now the names of the Gods and peoples of Germania gained their meaning; now the social structure of the Aryans opened up to his gaze; the Armanen and the nobility emerged in their marvelous grandeur; the old Aryan Rita (the law) rose from obscurity and described its desperate struggle against the new life teachings of Christianity and the Roman law that came with it; we see the Feme (courts, law?), the Logentum (secret societies, occult, misdirection), the Kala (secret lodges?), the heraldry, how these last emanations of the preservation power gradually lost their sense of necessity and either perished or continued to exist in contrast to their original task; the old salvation signs and glyphs appear and explain the old-Aryan pictorial writing, in their turn again opening up the understanding of heraldry, which had also been lost; we see in German territorial parts the observation posts of old Germanic living among us with secrets, which are still today - through a millennium - faithfully preserved. All these are only hints, can and should be only hints. It is impossible to show here by facts the enormous importance of the work which Guido List has created and on which he is still working. And because I must refrain from doing so, the presentation of the relationships that I see intertwined between Guido List's life's work and the German school will also suffer. For these relations alone, however, I can speak out here, in a teacher's journal.

I take one characteristic fact for granted: there are well-known, very conservative men who belong to the Guido List Society, and there are very liberal men. They may as well be German democratic men. Forgive me for choosing terms that have been coined by foolish politics. But I must not exclude them here if I want to be clear. And what does this characteristic of diversity of thought mean? That Guido List's source of teaching gives a springboard from which we can all jump off; a way of looking at things in which - when we have recognized and grasped it as a whole - we can all strive for the same thing. I would like to mention one man in particular who was a Guido-Listian: the Mayor of Vienna, Dr. Lueger, the leader of the Austrian Christian Social Party. So he, too, aspired to the same. How broad must this

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foundation be that what someone professes and advocates in life as his first principle takes second place to Guido List's insights and has only the purpose of serving an even higher goal, for the open representation of which the time does not yet seem mature enough!

Let us look into our time, and let me become a little political-personal. Walk with me as far as you are able, and where you have to stop, think about things again!

Today we know - apart from the Social Democracy, of which I may spare myself to speak here (the center will be mentioned later) - only two large party formations: conservatism and liberalism. The former wants to "preserve", the latter to "progress". Both principles could be compatible, if they engaged each other in the appropriate way. But they do not. The relationship is left up to the circles which have leadership and - according to the situation - must keep it. The landed aristocracy leads the conservative direction, and Jewry the liberal one. The former is outside our time, the latter outside our völkisch blood community. That is why the two "cannot come together".

Do not believe dear reader that this should be a reproach for both sides. It is only the attempt to understand. The old Germanic nobility once were from the center of the people of the time and was both selected from high quality commoners, but also mainly racially inherited. It originated from the democratic as well as from the aristocratic principle, which can be thought of - from which it once again emerges that every originally essential concept can be developed into a Faustian and into a Mephistophelian side. The value of the nobility began to worsen when the free Germanic peasants, due to understandable circumstances, sought bondage. When this bondage was again eliminated by history, a "liberal principle" came, namely that of free trade in land, and another such principle, namely the - at first theoretical - elimination of inheritance, which in turn contained in a liberal act a highly retrograde one, namely the denial of blood selection, which in the case of plants or animals the most liberal people today think so little of denying, that even a not insignificant part of the increase of our economic life is based on this selection. But this is besides the point.

Thus the nobility was uprooted; it continued to exist, but outside its time. And today it still finds its support in the fact that it binds its landed property, that is, withdraws it from free trade (in the fideicommissum), and that it cultivates, as far as possible, purity of blood and public service (the latter in the officer and civil service). This natural conservative leadership - the leadership is due to these circles on the basis of quality today as it was in the past (in their camp of opinion) - now sees that freedom of trade, at least with respect to the soil, and racial mixture, with disregard of the principle of selection, does not coincide with the requirements of the preservation of the people, and against this their historical conscience is stirred, which may at best be supplemented

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by the much-discussed "junker self-interest," but the latter is by no means the main factor, as the agitators of the opposite side, for instance, are at pains to portray it.

Today we have reached the point where a great many people bless, without a single stalk of straw, what is often called this idea of a "junkerish" or "agrarian self-interest", but which in reality is based on an instinctive, deeper grasp of the prerequisites of all permanent cultures than is otherwise the case today. Well, these forces see the people-consuming effectiveness of the urge to the big cities, the flight from the soil, and the morality-destroying quality of what we call "culture" today, and they even see how unintentionally and even in spite of the stumbling block set by the present local history, nevertheless also the activity of the school system favors that people-destroying development. They now say, and my readers will also follow this logic: The national stock is worth more than the high development of schools! Our school system is not yet the right one, because otherwise it would contribute to ensuring the continuity of the people, instead of promoting the opposite tendency! This explains the attitude of the conservative circles towards the school and the teaching profession, which today appears to most teachers simply as "hostility towards school and education".

Decisively and clearly I advocate that in the case of German men, whom one will never or would never deny personal respect, one should also never regard mere self-interest as the main driving force of their actions. If one does, he will never do justice to such men. Just as little as one would do justice to a liberal citizen or teacher of the city with the assertion that he is "hostile to the peasantry" out of pure self-interest - a reading that is not entirely untrue, but not generally so. The conservative school of thought is rather waiting, in its best members, with pain, for a school to unfold that it can support with a glad heart as ennobling and preserving the people at the same time.

Now would come the opposite side. For a long time I found myself unable to fully comprehend the German men of 1848. The courtship of mistresses (the Lola Montez affair) was not sufficient for this indignation; the partial abolition of the guilds did not give sufficient reason for the demand for freedom of trade; the situation of the peasants, who had been freed from bondage a few decades earlier, did not give sufficient reason for the demand for freedom of movement. There was only one thing that did: the desire for unity of the empire. That makes sense to me.

Why were the other demands made? Anyone who knows the history of that time well enough knows that these were the demands of Jewry, whom the Jewish British Minister D'Israeli said created the revolutions of 1848. The money for the development of liberalism came from these circles. The German demands were met over the course of two decades. It was only Bismarck that fulfilled the Germans' desire, when this had almost gone to sleep in the broadest strata.

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Anyone who knows Guido von List now understands the thoughts behind the German liberal will. They were hereditary thoughts from a bygone era that were to be resurrected. It was felt that cultural necessities and the economic framework had diverged and that the structure of society no longer corresponded to the needs of the people as a result of the shifts brought about by Roman law and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. But that all fermented and came to no clarity. Judaism, on the other hand, whose world of ideas begins and ends in material life, was clear about its demands and pushed them through with the help of liberalism. And these demands are not based on ideas that have grown up in our people and take into account the permanent needs of our people.

In my opinion similar things like freedom of trade and freedom of movement would also have had this effect, but in a different way and on the basis of a land law that would have prevented the harmful consequences. But one did not wait until German liberalism was mature enough to be the leader here, and this explains why German liberalism has not yet won a position on the core questions of the population that goes into depth. From this point of view he believed that everything was going well and was amazed when Bismarck had to put his customs legislation into effect and when we had to begin to revise the freedom of trade step by step backwards and also to break out the sharpest fangs of freedom of movement through home legislation. After all, a man like Prof. Brentano manages to explain that it doesn't matter if the peasantry perishes as a result of free trade, because sooner or later bread will be obtained directly from the ground by chemistry! As if the preservation of the peasantry were only a question of subsistence and not a question of national strength of insurmountable importance!

Liberalism believed that everything was in order and threw itself into the "cultural" uprising of the people. In doing so, it fell into the incomprehensible confusion of culture and civilization, which probably still characterizes it on the left, while nationalistic liberalism moved away from this more and more. However, it is still the case today that liberals generally value present-day school education higher than the right-wing parties, while in contrast to this liberals regard the national dangers, which are unconsciously also promoted by this school system, as less important, or even does not see them at all. As a result, liberalism is consistently seen as an enthusiastic supporter of the school and the teaching profession. More and more, however, despite the failure of the great liberal press on this point, liberalism will also begin to recognize the dark side, at least among its German supporters, and the result will naturally be a strong bridge of understanding between left and right, which will have some restraint in store for the school until the new ideal of the school, which Germanness needs, can come into being.

But offering us this ideal is primarily a matter for the teaching profession,

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and it is also in the interests of the profession. All things among the people are best when the interests of the people and the interests of the class run parallel to one another or even in the same line. If the teaching profession offers us the desired ideal, it becomes the leader of the people of the first rank. And maybe they can offer the ideal to us if the teachers make Guido von List's work fruitful for themselves, that is, for the school. At the same time, this is the way to free the school (and the people!) from the tutelage of the Christian hierarchy. I don't want anything else to seem viable. Today very many people who are no longer subject to the Christian hierarchy still support the latter in all its rights and possibilities of action, because the church is today the only source of morals that still have a strengthening effect on the people. It is better to have a people that repays the clergy than one that staggers towards its downfall, ignorant and free from priestly rule. Do not accuse me of exaggeration here; I know that these trains of thought are generally not considered by teachers and that these sources of knowledge do not flow to most teachers! But think of Lueger, who as a Listian knew all the mischief that the Catholic clergy brought upon the German people, and yet still supported the Catholic Church wherever he could throughout his life!

If the German teachers bring us an ideal of education that replaces the influence of the Christian Church with down-to-earthness and national preservation, then they have defeated the paralysis of the center and through conservatism they will then have become masters of that spirit which suppresses church influences for the sake of folk customs and which national preservation seeks to strengthen. As I said, the way leads through Guido von List. Because we never want to come to our people with an empty teaching of attitudes or morality, as now prevails in France. That would be hastening the downfall. Solid threads running through the line of the sexes must bind man to the nation and fatherland and adjust his life so that it runs in harmony with the whole. The Christian church commands with the various "Thou shalt nots!". All it will take is a single, majestic "Thou shalt!" And this imperative must be grounded in a scientifically unassailable, positive world view.

*For a long time you have cradled
Your heavy head in the breeze,
Pale gold of full ears
That today are ripened.
Have you not on hard land
Often lamented thy hard lot,
Hast thou not been in the sun's rays
Waiting for the fruit to come?
But the nights have passed,
Like the days' fearful flight,
And ripened is the right
Blessed, mild fruit.*

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